B.

CLARA VAUGHAN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

CLARA VAUGHAN.

A NOVEL.

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CLARA VAUGHAN.

BOOK II. *(continued).*

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CHAPTER XVII.

Late in the evening of that same day, I sat in my room by the firelight only (for I could not work) and tried to look into myself, and find out the cause of my strange attraction or rather impulsion towards Isola. Somehow or other I did not wonder so much that she should be drawn quite as strongly towards me, although an impartial observer would perhaps have wondered far more. After puzzling myself in vain with this inquiry, my thoughts began to move in their usual gloomy train.

Eight years had now elapsed, and what had I discovered? Nothing; but at long dark intervals some impress of the deed itself, more than of the doer. Had I halted in pursuit, or had my vengeance cooled? To the former question my conscience answered "yes," to the latter "no." Gentle influences had been shed around me, sorrow had bedewed the track of hate, intercourse with happy harmless people, and gratitude for un-

merited kindness; it was not in human nature, however finely constitute for evil, entirely to repulse these powers.

I could not deny, that the religion of my heart, during the last twelvemonth, had been somewhat neglected. For my devotion to dear mother, no plea was required. But the time since that, what business had I with laughing children, and snug firesides, with dickybirds, and Sandy the squirrel? Even sweet Isola caused me a pang of remorse; but no, I could not quite abandon her. But now, thank God, I was in the right road again, and plodding resolutely as my father could expect. To his spirit, ever present with me, I knelt down and poured out my remorse; and swore to make amends, whatever it might cost me. Yet even then, a gentle shadow seemed to come as well, and whisper the words that calmed the face of death.

My musings, if so mild a word may suit them, were roughly interrupted by a loud step on the stairs. Inspector Cutting, who could walk when needful like a cat, loved to redress this injury to the Goddess Echo, by making double noise when not on business. Farmer Huxtable, a man of twice the weight, would have come up those stairs at half the expense in sound.

When he entered the room, he found himself in a semi-official state again, and I saw that he was not come for nothing. In a few brief words, he told me what he had done, which was not very much ; or perhaps my suspicion was right, that he only told me a part of it. Then he said abruptly,

" Miss Valence, I know pluck when I see it."

" What do you mean, Mr. Cutting ?"

" Excuse me, I forgot that you have been reared in the country. What I mean is, that I believe you possess an unusual share of courage."

" As to that, I cannot say, having never been severely tried ; but in such a cause as mine, I could go through a good deal."

" And not lose your presence of mind, even in real danger ?"

" That again I cannot say, and for the same reason. But I am quite ready to make the trial."

I felt the colour mounting in my cheeks. How glad I should be to prove to myself that I was not ignoble. He observed me closely, and appeared quite satisfied.

" What I have to propose to you, is attended with no little danger."

"I will do my utmost not to be afraid. I am more impulsive perhaps than brave, but what is life worth to me? I will try to think of that all the time. No doubt you have a good reason for exposing me to danger."

"Certainly I have, Miss Valence. For your own purpose it is most important that you should be able to identify certain persons, whom I shall show you to-night; that is, unless I am misinformed."

"To-night! so late as this?" And I began to tremble already.

"Yes, we must go to-night, or wait for another fortnight; and then it would be no earlier, even if we got such a chance again, And for your sake it is better than to be in a fright for a fortnight."

"Inspector Cutting, I am in no fright whatever. At least I mean no more so than any other girl would be, who felt a vague danger impending. I hope and trust that my father's memory and the justice of God will be with me."

"Young lady, I see that I may safely venture it. If you had boasted, I should have hesitated, though I have had some proof already of your determination. The

chief, and indeed the only danger, is lest you lose your presence of mind, and that most females would do, if placed as you will be. Now I wish you to make deliberate choice, and not to be carried away by impulse vindictiveness, or the love of adventure; which, when the spirit is high like yours, too often leads young females into trouble, from which it is not always possible even for the most capable members of the force to extricate them."

"Of course I know all that. How much longer are we to talk? Must I disguise myself? When am I to be ready? And where are we going?"

"Now you are growing impatient. That is not a good sign. Remember, I can easily procure another witness; but for your own sake I wish to give you the chance. Probably you will see to-night the man who killed your father."

As he spoke my flesh was creeping, and my blood ran cold, then suddenly flushed through my system like electric fluid. He began again as coolly as if he were reporting a case of some one discovered "drunk and incapable." From force of habit, he touched his forehead, and stood at attention, as he spoke. "In con-

sequence of information which I have received, I have been induced to make certain inquiries, which have resulted in the conviction that the criminal I am in search of will be present at a certain place this night, at a certain hour. It is therefore my intention to embrace the opportunity of—"

"Catching him!" cried I in a breathless hurry."

"To embrace the opportunity," continued the Inspector, like a talking oak, "of conducting my investigations personally, and in the presence of a witness. The effect thereby produced upon my mind shall be entered duly, the moral effect I should have said, and the cause of justice will be promoted as rapidly as is consistent with the principles of our glorious constitution."

"Do you mean to say that you will let him go?"

"No, I shall not let him go, Miss Valence, for the simple reason that I shall not apprehend him. I see that you are inclined to take the law into your own hands. That will never do for me."

"Oh no, I am not. A year ago I would have done so. But I am older and wiser now."

I was thinking of dear mother; and began to feel already that my character was changing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Inspector Cutting gave me some minute instructions, and in less than half an hour we set forth upon our enterprise. I was wrapped in a loose grey cloak having a hooded cape; and carefully hidden I carried for self-defence a very keen stiletto. I had procured it indirectly from the best cutler in London, but neither workmanship nor material could be compared to that of Italy.

The night was dark and cold, the streets were almost deserted, and all the shops except the chemists' and the public-houses closed. We walked straightway to the nearest cabstand, where Mr. Cutting ordered a vehicle, and put me inside, himself riding with the driver. So little did I know as yet of London, that after the first turn or two, I could not even guess what direction we were taking. I had such confidence in my guide, a staid respectable man with a grown up family, that I

never thought there could be harm in my journeying with him at night. And even had I thought so, most likely I should have done it all the same. Ever since the time he wounded me, or allowed me to wound myself, his manner towards me had been most kind, considerate, and respectful; though he found it his duty now and then to repress my impetuosity.

With all my perception alert, I kept a sharp look-out from the window, but vainly strove to find anything that might serve for a landmark. Once we stopped for about five minutes, at a police-station somewhere in Clerkenwell, where, by the light of a lamp, I read, without leaving the cab, the ghastly descriptions of all the dead bodies recently found in London and waiting identification. Hereupon my courage began to ooze, and the weather seemed much colder. The type was hard to read at that distance, and the imagination had fair play, as it does when words come slowly.

Anon the inspector reappeared, so altered in dress and countenance, that I did not know him until he made me a bow. With a glance of encouragement, and a little grin of dry humour, he mounted the box again. After another long drive, in the course of which we ran

silently over a wooden road,—probably High Holborn, —we stopped in a broad but deserted thoroughfare, very badly lighted. Here Mr. Cutting opened the door, helped me out, and discharged the cab, but whispered something to the driver before he let him go.

"Now take my arm, Miss Valence, if you please. I have escorted many a lady of higher birth than yours."

"Of higher title perhaps, Mr. Cutting; and their grandfathers money-lenders, or perhaps far worse."

"I am sure I don't know; we must take things as we find them. I thought you despised such nonsense. But the cabbage that runs to seed is the tallest in the field. No Englishman sees the nonsense of it, unless he happens to be a detective or a grave-digger."

"Do you mean to say that those of lofty birth are worse than those of low birth?"

"No, I mean nothing of the sort. But I do mean that they ought to be better, and on the whole are not so. Nature holds the balance, and temptation and education chuck into the opposite scales, and I think the first chucks fastest. At any rate I would rather have a good drunken navvy than a lord to take to the

station. I mean of course when my own rank was not what it is."

This little dissertation was meant to divert my thoughts. I made no reply, being ignorant of such matters; neither did I care to talk about them then. Nevertheless, I believe Inspector Cutting was wrong. As we entered a narrow street he suddenly turned and looked at me.

"Poor child! how you tremble! Draw your cape more forward; the bitter cold requires it. Are you trembling from fear?"

"No; only from cold." But I tried in vain to think so.

"A steady hand and steadfast nerve are wanted for your task. If you cannot rely on them, say so at once. In five minutes you will have no retreat."

"I shall be better directly. But I am so cold. Inspector Cutting, it must be freezing hard—ten degrees, I should think."

"It does not freeze at all. I see we must warm you a little. But no more 'Inspector Cutting,' if you please, until to-morrow."

Hereupon he led me into a little room, fenced off

from the bar of some refreshment-house. A glorious fire was burning, by which he set and left me. Presently he returned, with a small glass in his hand.

"Drink this, young lady. It will warm you, and brace your nerves."

I saw by the firelight that it was brandy, or some dark-coloured spirit.

"No, I thank you. Do you suppose that I require Dutch courage?"

I threw such emphasis on the personal pronoun, and looked at him so indignantly, that he laughed outright.

"I thank you in turn. You suppose that I do. I will justify your discernment." And with that he tipped it off, and then returned to business, all the graver for the interlude.

"Now, if you are really warm, we will start again. Stop one moment. I have heard you cough two or three times. Can you keep it under?"

I assured him that I could very easily do so, and that it was nothing but the sudden effect of the cold. Forth we went again into the winter night, after I had learned from him that we were now in Whitechapel, not far from Goodman's Fields.

After another short walk, we came to the end of a narrow by-street, where there was an archway. Passing through this archway, we descended some steep and broken steps. Then the Inspector produced a small lamp brightly burning, which he must have lit at the public-house. It was not what is called a bull's-eye, but a reflector-lamp. By its light I saw that the chief entrance to the house must be round the corner, and perhaps in another street. With a small key which he took from his pocket, Mr. Cutting unlocked a little iron gate, and we entered a narrow passage. At the end of it was a massive door studded with great nails. Here my guide gave a gentle knock, and hid the lamp as before.

Presently we heard a shrill sound from the keyhole, like a dryad's voice. The Inspector stooped thereto, and pronounced the password. Not without some difficulty the lock was turned and the bolts withdrawn, and we stood inside. A child, under-sized and unnaturally sharp, stared at us for a moment, then dodged away from the lamp, as if more accustomed to darkness. Mr. Cutting closed the door and refastened it, then led me through some basement rooms unpaved and un-

furnished, until we came to an iron step-ladder. This he ascended, and helped me up, and we found ourselves in a small dark lobby, containing no furniture, except a high three-legged stool. When he closed his lamp all around was dark, but on the rafters overhead a faint patch of light appeared—ceiling there was none.

"Do you see that light?" he whispered to me, pointing, as I could just perceive, to a narrow glazed opening high in the wall, whence the faint gleam proceeded.

"Then jump upon this stool, and do your best to see through."

He cast the light of his lamp upon the stool for a moment, while I did as he bade me. Standing there, I found that I was tall enough to look through; but the narrow pane which formed the window was thickly covered with size, or some opaque integument. All I could tell was, that the space beyond was lighted.

"I know you can't see now," he said, as I came down despairing, "but you shall see by and by. The fools who were here before sized the glass on the wrong side, and this lot, though much sharper, have not corrected the error. They keep that window for escape in the last resort. Now take this bottle and this camel's-hair

brush; it will make the glass transparent without the smallest noise. The men are not there yet. We could easily rub it clear now, but they will examine it. When the time comes, use the liquid most carefully and lightly, and don't spread it higher than an inch from the bottom of the frame. The lights are at this end; the shadow of the sill will allow you just an inch."

"And how far may I go horizontally?"

"The whole length of the glass, to command as much view as possible. The effect will pass in three or four minutes, but you must not do it again. If you do, the glass will fly, and you will be in their hands. Desperate men they are, and though I shall be near, I might be too late to save you. See all you can, to be able to swear to them all."

"How shall I know the one?"

"I cannot tell you. I must leave it to your instinct, or your intuition. I only know myself that he is one of the four. My information, such as it is, was obtained very oddly, and I trust to this night's work to make it more precise. One thing more: No noise, if you value your life. Keep the bottle stopped. Don't let the stuff drop on you; don't put your eyes to it, or it will blind

you for ever. There is very little of it, because it is so deadly."

"When shall I do it?"

"In one hour from this time. Take this repeater. I have shown you how to use it. Look well at it now, while you have the light."

I looked at the watch; it was nearly midnight.

"Am I to be left in the dark—all in the dark here, by myself?"

"Yes. I must be seen elsewhere, or the whole thing fails. They know me even in this dress, and they watch me as I do them. But for to-night I believe I have misled them. When it is over, wait here till I come for you, or the little girl you saw."

"Oh! I wish I had never come; and all so vague and indecisive!"

"You can go back now, if you please; though ever that would be dangerous."

"I will not go back. No doubt I shall know him. When will you secure him?"

"When my evidence is completed. Now, remember, you have to deal with men keen as hawks, and stealthy as tigers. But there is no real danger, if you keep

your self-command. Observe all four as narrowly as you can, both for your own sake and for mine. Be careful to stand on the centre of the stool. But you had better not get upon it until they have searched the room. Now, good-bye. I trust to your courage. If any harm comes, I will avenge you."

"A comfort that! What good will it be to me?"

"If vengeance is no good, what are you doing here?"

"Thank you. That is no business of yours. Don't let me detain you."

He told me afterwards that he had vexed me on purpose to arouse my mettle. And I am sure I needed it.

"Ah! now you are all right. If your caution fails you, the man who slew your father will be sure to escape us."

"If it fails me, 'twill be from anger, not from terror."

"I know it. Let me look at you."

He threw the full light on my face. The burnished concave was not brighter or firmer than my eyes.

"Pale as death, and quite as resolute. Rely only upon yourself."

"God and myself," I whispered, as he glided out of

sight along the vaults below. I could see no other entrance to the place in which I sat; but how could I tell?

For a minute excitement kept me hot; but as the last gleam of the light died upon the wall below, my heart began to throb heavily, and a chill came over me. The pulse thumped in my ears, like a knocking in the cellar. "Was it fear?" I asked myself, in scorn that I should ask. No, it was not fear, but horrible suspense. The balance of life and death, of triumph and disgrace, swung there before me in the dark, as if my breath would turn it. No dream of a child, no vagary of the brain—the clear perception of strong will and soul poised upon this moment.

The moment was too long; the powers began to fail, the senses grew more faint and confused at every heavy throb. Little images and little questions took the place of large ones. In vain I looked for even a cobweb, or the skeleton of a fly, where the dull light flickered through the pane of glass. In vain I listened for a mouse. Even a rat (much as I hate him) would have been welcome then. The repeater was purposely made so low of tick, that I got no comfort thence. All was

deep, unfathomable silence, except the sound of my rebel heart.

As a forlorn hope, I began to reckon sixty slowly, as a child keeps with a ticking clock.

It would not do. My heart was beating louder than ever, and my hands were trembling; even my teeth rattled like dice in a box as the time approached.

The nerves will not be hoodwinked; the mind cannot swindle the body. I once slapped the cheeks of my governess. I cannot treat nature so. Try the sweet influence, and the honest coin of reason. It will not do. All trembling, I strike the repeater. Five minutes more, and the trial must come. My heart is fluttering like a pigeon's throat. The long suspense has been too much. Oh! why was I submitted to this cruel ordeal? The walls are thick. I can hear no movement in the secret room.

There comes a creeping, fingering, sound, as of one whose candle is out, groping for the door. It passes along the pane of glass, and a shadow is thrown on the rafter. Who can it be? What stealthy hand but that of my father's murderer?

The word—the thought is enough. What resolution,

reason, justice, all in turn, have failed to do, passion has done at once—passion at myself, as well as at my enemy. Is it Clara Vaughan, who, for eight long years of demon's reign, has breathed but for this moment—is Clara Vaughan to shake like the wooden-legged blackbird now her chance is come?

A rush of triumph burned, like vitriol, through my veins. Every nerve was braced, every sense alert and eager. Against the light of that window, dull as it was, I could have threaded the finest needle that ever was made.

I struck my repeater again. It was the hour, the minute, when my father died. With the mere spring of my instep I leaped upon the stool. I could see it clearly now. I dipped the broad camel's-hair brush in the flat phial, holding it carefully at arm's length, and then drew it lightly along the pane, quite at the bottom, from corner to corner. One more dip, one more stripe above, a steam hovered on the glass, and there was a gazing-place, clear as crystal, and wide enough to show most of the narrow room. Of the room itself I took no heed; the occupants were my study.

Only four in all. One man at a high desk writing

rapidly; three men sitting round a small table, talking earnestly, and with much gesticulation, but the tone too low for me even to guess their language. From the appearance, manner, and action of the speakers, I felt sure that it was not English, and I thought that it was not French. Why, I cannot say; but my attention fixed itself upon the man who was writing at the top of the room. Perhaps it was because I could see him best, for he stood with his face full towards me.

He was a man of middle age and stature, strongly framed, closely knit, and light of limb, with a handsome, keenly oval face, broad forehead, black eyes, glancing quickly and scornfully at his three comrades, long hair of an iron grey, falling on his shoulders, and tossed back often with a jerk of the head. His hands were white and restless, quick as light in their motion. On the left thumb flashed a large red jewel. Though I could not see the paper, I knew by the course of the quill that the writing was very small. But one minute I watched him, for the film was returning upon the glass, and I must scan the others; yet in that time he had written several lines, half of them without looking at the paper, but with his eyes upon the other three.

I knew him now he was in clear light, I could swear to him anywhere again. The last glance I could spare him sent a shudder through me, for in his impatience he shifted one foot from the shade of the desk. It was small, pointed, and elegant.

The film was thickening, like frost upon the pane, when I began to observe the others. But I saw enough to print their faces on my memory, or those at least of two. The third I could not see so well. He seemed older than the rest. All the men wore loose grey tunics, with a red sash over the left shoulder. I judged that the three were debating hotly, as to some measure, upon which the fourth had resolved. Every now and then, they glanced at him uneasily.

At him I gazed again, with deadly hatred, cold as ice, upon my heart. I felt my dagger handle. Oh for one moment with him! In my fury I forgot the Inspector's warning. The film was closing over. I touched the glass with my lashes. A flash of agony shot through my eyes. With a jerk I drew back, the stool rocked under me, one foot of it struck the wall. I clutched the window sill, and threw my weight inwards. Down came the foot of the stool, loud as the bang of a door.

I thought it was all over. How I stifled a scream I know not; had it escaped me, I should never have told this story. I had the presence of mind to stand still, and watch, though my eyes were maddening me, what the cut-throats would do. Through the agony, and the dimness, I could just see them all start, and rush to the door at the side of the room. The writer stood first, with his papers thrust anyhow into his bosom, a pistol in one hand, a poniard in the other. Did I know the shape of it? The other three were armed, but I could not see with what. They crouched behind a heavy screen, presenting (I supposed) their pistol muzzles at the door. Finding no attack ensue, they began to search. Now was the real danger to me. If they searched that window before the size returned, my life ended there. Fear was past. Desperation seized me. If I was doomed to blindness, just as well to death. But I clutched my dagger. . . . . .

My left ear was against the wall. I heard a hand graze the partition inside, then a chair placed under the embrasure, and a step upon it. I was still upon the stool, stooping close beneath the window frame. Suddenly the light streak vanished, the size flew over it, as the

breath flies over glass in the hardest frost. The hand felt along the window frame, the dull shadow of a head flitted upon the beam. It was within a foot of mine. The searcher passed on, without suspicion.

Strange it was, but now the deadliest peril was over, triple fear fell upon me. The heat flew back to my heart, just now so stanch and rigid ; my hair seemed to creep with terror. Dear life, like true love scorned, would have its way within me. Quietly I slid down from the stool, and cowered upon it, in a storm of trembling. My eyelids dropped in agony, I could not lift them again, but blue and red lights seemed to dance within them. I had made up my mind to blindness ; but not, oh not just yet, to death.

How long I remained in this abject state, scorning myself, yet none the braver, is more than I can tell, or even cared to ask. May it never be the lot of any, not even the basest murderer! Worn out at last, in a lull of pain and terror, I fell into deep sleep, from which I was awakened by a hand upon my shoulder.

I tried to look up, but could not. Sight was fled, and as I thought for ever. But I felt that it was a friend.

"Ah, I see how it is"—the voice was Inspector Cut-

ting's—"my poor child, there is now no danger. Give me your hand:" he tried to lift me, but I fell against the wall.

"Take a sip of this, we must restore circulation. It is the cold as much as anything; another sip, Miss Vaughan." He used my true name on purpose; it helped to restore me. He was most humane and kind; he did not even remind me of Dutch courage.

CLARA VAUGHAN.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

In the morning I dreamed of Isola. Across a broad black river, I saw her lovely smile. Thick fog rose from the water, in which two swans were beating a dog, and by snatches only could I see my darling. She waved her little hand to me, and begged me, with that coaxing smile which bent cast iron and even gold, to come across to Isola. In vain I looked for a boat, even in my dream I knew that I could not swim, and if I could, the lead upon my eyelids would have sunk me. So I called to her to come to me, and with that cry awoke.

It was striking ten—my own little clock which my father gave me. I counted every stroke. What was Mrs. Shelfer doing, that she had not called me yet? What was I doing, that I lay there so late; for I always get up early? And what was the sun about, that no light came into the room? I knew it was ten in the morning.

I felt all round. I was in my little bed, the splinter

at the side of the head-board ran into my finger as usual. There I was, and nowhere else. Was it a tremendous fog? If it was, they should have told me, for they knew that I liked fogs. At least they thought so, from the interest I felt.

I groped for the little bell-pull, a sleezy worsted cord, which meant to break every time, but was not strong enough to do it. I jerked with all my strength, which seemed very little somehow. What a pleasure! The bell rang like a fire-peal. I fell back on the pillow, exhausted, but determined to have it out with Mrs. Shelfer. I put my hands up to arrange my hair, to look a little more like Clara Vaughan, when the light should enter, and to frighten Mrs. Shelfer.

There was something on my head. I never wear a night-cap; my long black hair would scorn it. Am I in a madhouse, is this put to keep me cool? Cold it is, and my brain so hot. All Wenham lake on Dives, and he will only hiss. While I am pulling at it, and find it streaming wet, in comes—I know her step—Mrs. Shelfer. But there is no light from the passage!

"Mrs. Shelfer, what do you mean by this?"

"By what, my dear good soul? I have done all the

blessed things I was told to do for you. You might have put a ostrich feather or a marabout to my mouth, Miss Valence, and tucked me up, and a headstone, and none the wiser, when Uncle John brought you home last night."

"I suppose I am dreaming. But I am sure I rang the bell."

"Miss Valence, you did so, and no mistake. Bless me! I started in my shoes. A good job, Shelfer wasn't home, he's so nervous. He'd have gone for gin straightways. Now get up, that's a dear good soul, and when you have had some breakfast, we'll talk over it, Miss Valence. Let me see how your eyes are. Uncle John said they was bad, and I was to keep them covered. I expects him here every minute. Now turn them up to the light. What large eyes you have, to be sure. Bless me! Where are your long black lashes?"

"Mrs. Shelfer, there is some strange mistake. Let the light into the room."

I had risen in the bed, and her breath was on my forehead.

"Light, dear child, I can't let more. The sun is on your face."

I fell back upon my pillow, and could rise no more. The truth had been tingling through me, all the time she talked. I was stone-blind. I flung the bandage from me, and wished my heart would break. Mrs. Shelfer tried some comfort. She seemed to grieve for my eyelashes, more than for my eyes; and addressed her comfort more to my looks than sight. Of course, I did not listen. When would the creature be gone, and let me try to think?

Poor little thing! I was very sorry; what fault was it of hers? Who and what am I, blind I, to find fault with any one who means me well? I drop my eyelids, I can feel them fall; I lift them, I can feel them rise; a full gaze, a side gaze, a half gaze; with both eyes, with one; it is all the same; gaze there may be, but no sight. Henceforth I want no eyelids.

The sun is on my face. I can feel his winter rays, though my cheeks are wet. What use is he to me?

I have the dagger somewhere by which my father died. Let me find it, if I can.

I could have sworn that the box was in that corner carefully concealed. I strike against a washing-stand. Ah, now I have it; the box is locked, my keys are in

the top-drawer. I bear the box to the bed, and go groping for the chest of drawers. Already I can tell by the sun-warmth on my face, which way I am going. Surely, if I wait, I shall have the instinct of the blind.

What care I for that? The coward love of life suggested that poor solace. Now I have the keys. Quick unlock the box.

At length I throw the cover back. The weapon handle is to the right. I stoop to seize it. I grasp a square of colour. Pretty instinct this! I have got my largest drawing box.

Oh paints, my paints, so loved but yesterday, that ape the colours I shall never see, my hot tears make you water-colours indeed! If God has robbed my eyes of sight, He has not dried my tears.

The gushing flood relieves me. What right have I to die? Even without asking if my case be hopeless! Who knows but what these lovely tints may glow for me again? May I not once more intone the carmine damask of the rose, the gauzy green of April's scarf? Softening scenes before me rise. I lay my box of colours by, and creep into my bed for warmth.

Presently the doctor comes. Inspector Cutting has

chosen him, and chosen well. From his voice I know that he is a gentleman, from his words and touch instinctively I feel that he understands the case.

When he has finished the examination he sees me trembling for the answer which I dare not seek.

"Young lady, I have hopes, strong hopes. It is quite impossible to say what course the inflammation may pursue. All depends on that. At present there is a film over the membrane, but the cornea is uninjured. Perfect quiet, composure, so far as in such a case is possible, cold applications, and the exclusion of light, are the simple remedies. All the rest must be left to nature. Avoid excitement of any kind. Diet as low as possible. Do not admit your dearest friends, unless they will keep perfect silence. Even so, they are better away, unless you pine at loneliness."

"Oh no. I am quite accustomed to that."

"That is well. I shall make a point of calling daily, but shall not examine your eyes every time. The excitement and the effort would strain the optic nerve. Our object is to keep the inflammation from striking inwards. I should not tell you all this, but I see that you have much self-command. On that and your constitu-

tion, under Providence, the cure depends. One question. I am not a professed ophthalmist, would you prefer to have one?"

"Oblige me with your opinion."

"It is a delicate point for me. There is no operation to perform. It is a medical, not a surgical case. I have dealt with such before. Were you my own child I would call in no ophthalmist, but as you are a stranger to me, I wish you to decide for yourself."

"Then, I will have none. I have perfect confidence in you."

He seemed gratified, and took his leave. "Please God, Miss Valence, you shall look me in the face ere long."

CHAPTER II.

"COMPOSURE is my only chance." What chance have I of composure until I know the meaning of what I saw last night? Blind though I am, one face is ever before me. No thickening of the membrane can exclude that face. Inspector Cutting is still below; I will send for him at once.

Mrs. Shelfer remonstrates. "It will excite you so, my good friend. The doctor said perfect quiet."

"Just so. I can have none, until I have spoken to your Uncle John. Let him stay in my sitting-room, open the folding-door a little, and then, Mrs. Shelfer, please to go down stairs."

I hear the Inspector's step, not so heavy this time. He asks how I am, and expresses his sorrow. I feel obliged to him for not reminding me that the fault was all my own. Then I implore him, if he wishes me ever to see again, to tell me all he knows about the men I saw last night.

Thus entreated, he cannot refuse me, but first looks up and down the stairs, as I know by the sound of his steps; then he shuts the door of the sitting-room. All he knows is not very much. They are refugees, Italian refugees; two political and two criminal exiles, leaders now of a conspiracy to revolutionize their country.

"But why does he not arrest them?"

"Simply because he has no right. As for the political refugees, of course, we never meddle with them; as for the two criminals, they have not been demanded by their Government. Wonderful now, isn't it? The two fellows who have committed murder their Government would not give sixpence for them; but the two men who have only spouted a little, it would give a thousand pounds for either of them. He can't understand such a system."

And Inspector Cutting sucks his lips—I know it by the sound—he always does it when he is in a puzzle. Being a true Englishman, he knows no more of serfdom, than of the dark half of the moon. I mean, of course, political serfdom. Of social slavery we have enough to last ten generations more.

"Would he be afraid to arrest them? He said they were desperate men."

"He should rather hope he wouldn't. They had got their knives, and pistols, and all that humbug. But it was more show than fight. They were desperate men in a private quarrel, particular when they could come round a corner, and when women were concerned; but as for showing honest fight, he would sooner come across three of them, than one good Irish murderer."

"What was his proof against my enemy? I need not ask him which it was."

The excitement of this question sent needles through my eyes. And I could not see him, to probe his pupils.

"Well, his proof was very little. In fact it was no proof at all as yet. But he was not like a juryman. He was quite convinced; and his eyes should never be off that man, until he had him under warrant, and the whole case clear. Would that satisfy me?"

He spoke with such hearty professional pride, that I could not help believing him. But as for being satisfied —why should his evidence be a mystery to me? "Catch him at once," was my idea; but a hot and foolish one. "Get up the evidence first," was Inspector Cutting's, "I

can catch him at any time." That was the whole gist of it. Could he always catch him?

He scorned the idea of there being any difficulty about it. The man could leave for no part of the Continent; he was a political refugee. America was his only bourne beyond the Inspector's jurisdiction. And thither he could not try to go without the Police being down upon him at once.

By this time I was worn out, though my reasons were not exhausted. In a word, I was only half satisfied, but I could not help myself. If, in my helpless blindness, I offended Inspector Cutting, the whole chance disappeared. Only one question remained. "Why did he take me thither?"

"For excellent reasons. As to the one, it was most important that I should always know him again. Moreover, it saved my energies from waste. As to the other three, he had his own reasons for requiring an intelligent witness about their proceedings."

I thought of the thousand pounds, and said no more. Inspector Cutting was an Englishman, and proud, in his way, of English freedom. But, like nine-tenths of us, he thought that we alone understand what freedom is.

What good was it to such fellows as those? They would only be free of one another's throats. And like all of us, with most rare exception, next to freedom, he valued money. For our love of this, many foreigners jeer us. All we can say is, that with us it is second, with them it is first. But we are of such staple, our second is stronger than their first.

When the Inspector was gone, I formed a very sensible resolve. Since there was nothing more to be done or learned at present, my only care should be the recovery of my sight. If I were to be blind till death, the purpose of my life was lost, and I might as well die at once. But now the first blind agony, the sudden shock, was over; and I had too much of what the Inspector denominated "pluck," to knock under so.

In the afternoon, when all was quiet, lovely Isola came. Strict orders had been given that no one should be admitted. But Mrs. Shelfer was not proof against the wiles of Isola.

"She smiled so bootiful, when I opened the door, Miss, it fetched out all my hair pins; and when I told her you was ill in bed, and struck stone blind along of some chemical stuff, two big tears came out of her long

blue eyes, same as the wet out of a pennorth of violets, Miss ; and as for stopping her, she threw her muff at me, and told me to stop that if I liked, and to run and tell you that she was coming, quick, quick ! "

" To be sure, and here I am ! " cried the cheery voice I loved so well. " Oh, Clara dear, dear Clara ! " The little darling flung her soft warm arms around me, utterly forgetful of her dress, forgetful of all the world, but that little bit of it she held. Her delicious breath came over my fevered cheek, her cool satin flesh was on my burning eyelids. What lotion could be compared to this? How long she stayed, I cannot tell ; I only know that while I heard her voice, and felt her touch, blindness seemed no loss to me. She pronounced herself head nurse ; and as for doctors, what were they, compared to her own father ? If she could coax him, he should come next day, and deliver his opinion, and then the doctor might betake himself to things he understood, if indeed he understood anything, which she did not believe he did, because he had said she was not to come. My drawings too she admired, much more than they deserved, and her brother Conrad must come and see them, he was so fond of drawing, and there was nothing he could not

do. She was so sorry she must go now, but old Cora must be tired of patroling, and she herself had a lecture to attend upon the chemical affinity of bodies. What it meant she had no idea, but that would not matter the least; some of the clever girls said they did, but she would not believe them; it took a man, she was sure, to understand such subjects. She would bring her work the next day, such as it was, and the nicest bit of sponge that was ever seen, it could not be bought in London; and she would answer for it I should be able to paint her likeness in a week; and she would not go till it was dark; and then the Professor should come for her when his lectures were over, and examine me; he knew all about optics, and retinas, and pencils of light, and refraction and aberration, and she could not remember any more names; but she felt quite certain this was a case of optical delusion, and nothing else.

How I wished I could have seen her, when she pronounced this opinion, with no little solemnity. She must have looked such a sage! The thought of that made me laugh, as well as the absurdity of the idea. But I only asked how the Professor was to examine my eyes, if he did not come till dark.

To be sure! She never thought of that. What a little goose she was! But she would make him come in the morning, before his work began; and then old Cora would fetch her home to tea. And she had very great hopes, that if she could only persuade her papa to deliver a lecture in my room, it would have such an effect on my optic nerves, that they would come all right directly, at any rate I should know how to treat them.

Delighted with this idea, she kissed me, and hugged me, and off she ran, after telling me to be sure to keep my spirits up, and the bandage not too tight.

The latter injunction was much easier to obey than the former. She had enlivened me wonderfully, as well as nursed me most delicately; but now that she was gone, the usual reaction commenced. Moreover, although as the saying is, the sight of her would have been good for sore eyes, the effort at seeing her, which I could not control, when she was present, was, I already felt, anything but good for them. And the loss, when she was gone, was like a second loss of light.

Light! What million thoughts flash through me at that little word! Swiftest thing the mind has met, too like itself to understand. Is it steed or wing of mind?

Nay, not swift enough for that. Is it then the food of life, prepared betimes ere life appeared, the food the blind receive but cannot taste? If so, far better to be blind from birth. Well I know the taste from memory; shall I never taste it else? Has beauty lost its way to me? The many golden folds of air, the lustrous dance of sunny morn, the soft reclining of the moon, the grand perspective of the stars (long avenue to God's own home), are these all blank to me, and night made one with day?

Oh God, whose first approach was light, replenisher of sun and stars, whence dart anew thy gushing floods (solid or liquid we know not), whose subtle volume has no bourne or track; light, the dayside half of life, leaping, flashing, beaming; glistening, twinkling, stealing; light! Oh God, if live I must, grudge me not a ray!

CHAPTER III.

Low fever followed the long prostration to which the fear of outer darkness had reduced my jaded nerves. This fever probably redeemed my sight, by generalizing the local inflammation, to which object the doctor's efforts had been directed. Tossing on my weary bed, without a glimpse of anything, how I longed for the soft caresses and cool lips of Isola! But since that one visit, she had been sternly excluded. The Professor had no chance of delivering his therapeutic lecture. In fact he did not come. "Once for all," said Dr. Franks, when he heard of that proposal, "choose, Miss Valence, between my services, and the maundering of some pansophist. If you prefer the former, I will do my utmost, and can almost promise you success; but I must and will be obeyed. None shall enter your room, except Mrs. Shelfer and myself. As to your lovely friend, of whom Mrs. Shelfer is so full, if she truly loves you, she will keep away.

She has done you already more harm than I can undo in a week. I am deeply interested in this case, and feel for you sincerely; but unless you promise me to see—I mean to receive—no one without my permission, I will come no more."

It sounded very hard, but I felt that he was right.

"No crying, my dear child, no crying! Dear me, I have heard so much of your courage. Too much inflammation already. Whatever you do, you must not cry. That is one reason why I will not have your friend here. When two young ladies get together in trouble, I know by my own daughters what they do. You may laugh as much as you like, in a quiet way; and I am sure Mrs. Shelfer can make any one laugh, under almost any circumstances. Can't you now?"

"To be sure, my good friend, I have seen such a many rogues. That is, when I know Charley's a-coming home."

"Now good bye, Miss Valence. But I would recommend you not to play with your paints so. There is an effluvium from them."

"Oh what can I do, what am I to do to pass the

endless night? I was only trying to build a house in the dark."

"Sleep as much as you can. I am giving you gentle opiates. When you can sleep no longer, let Mrs. Shelfer talk or read to you, and have a little music. I will lend you my musical box, which plays twenty-four tunes: have it in the next room, not to be too loud. And then play on the musical glasses, not too long at a time: you will soon find out how to do that in the dark."

He most kindly sent us both the boxes that very day; and many a weary hour they lightened of its load. Poor Isola came every day to inquire, and several times she had her brother with her. She made an entire conquest of Mrs. Shelfer, who even gave her a choice canary bird. I was never tired of hearing the little woman's description of her beauty, and her visit to the kitchen formed the chief event of the day. Mrs. Shelfer (who had Irish blood in her veins) used to declare that the ground was not good enough for them to walk on.

"Such a pair, Miss! To see her so light, and soft, and loving, tripping along, and such eyes and such fur;

and him walking so straight, and brave, and noble. I am sure you'd go a mile, Miss, to see him walk."

"You forget, Mrs. Shelfer, I may never enjoy that pleasure."

"No, no. Quite true, my good friend. But then we may, all the same."

Exactly so. There lay all the difference to me, but none to any other. This set me moralising in my shallow way, a thing by no means natural to me, who was so concentrated and subjective. But loss of sight had done me good, had turned the mind's eye inward into the darkness of myself. I think the blind, as a general rule, are less narrow-minded than those endowed with sight. Less inclined, I mean, to judge their neighbours harshly, less arrogant in exacting that every pulse keep time with their own. If eyes are but the chinks through which we focus on our brain censoriousness and bigotry, if rays of light are shafts and lances of ill will; then better is it to have no crystalline lens. Far better to be blind, than print the world-distorted puppets of myself. I, that smallest speck of dust, blown upon the shore of time, blown off when my puff shall come; a speck ignored by moon and stars; too small (however

my ambition leap) for earth to itch, whate'er I suck; and yet a speck that is a mountain in the telescope of God; shall I never learn that His is my only magnitude; shall I wriggle to be all in all to my own corpuscle?

CHAPTER IV.

Is there any Mocha stone, fortification agate, or Scotch pebble, with half the veins and mottlings, angles, flux and reflux, that chequer one minute of the human mind? Was ever machine invented to throw so many shuttles?

At present I am gauged for little threads of thought —two minutes since, the smallest thing I could think of was myself. Now it is the largest. Must I grope from room to room, shall I never be sure where the table is, where my teacup stands; never read, or write, or draw; never tell when my hands are clean, except by smelling soap; never know (though small the difference) how my dress becomes me, or when my hair is right; never see my own sad face, in which I have been fool enough to glory, never—and this is worst of all—never catch another's smile?

Here am I, a full-grown girl, full of maiden's thoughts

and wonderings, knowing well that I am shaped so but to be a link in life; must I never think of loving or of being loved, except with love like Isola's; sweet affection, very sweet; but white sugar only?

When my work is over, and my object gained, when my father's spirit knows the wrong redeemed, as a child I used to think I would lay me down and die. But since I came to woman's fulness, since I ceased to look at men and they began to look at me, some soft change, I know not what, has come across my dream.

Is my purpose altered? Is my tenor broken? Not a whit of either. Rather are they stronger set and better led, as my heart and brain enlarge. Yet I see beyond it all, a thing I never used to see, a glow above the peaks of hate, a possibility of home. "Saw" I should have said, for now what have I to do with seeing?

On the fourteenth morning, I had given up all hope. They told me it was bright and sunny; for I always asked about the weather, and felt most cruelly depressed upon a sunny day. By this time I had learned to dress without Mrs. Shelfer's aid. Still, from force of habit I went to the glass to do my hair, and still drew back, as far as was allowed, the window curtain.

Off with my wet bandage, I am sick of it; let me try no longer to delude myself.

Suddenly a gleam of light, I am sure of it; faint indeed, and like a Will of the Wisp; but I am quite sure it *was* a gleam of light. I go nearer the window and try again. No, there is no more for the present, it was the sudden change produced it. Never mind; I know what I have seen, a thing that came and cheated me in dreams; this time it has not cheated me; it was a genuine twinkle of the sun.

I can do nothing more. I cannot put another stitch upon me. I am thrilling with the sun, like Memnon. I fall upon my knees, and thank the Father of light.

When the Doctor came that day, and looked into my eyes, he saw a decided change.

"Miss Valence, the crisis is over. With all my heart I congratulate you. Another fortnight, and you will see better than ever."

I laughed, and wept, and, blind as I was, could hardly keep from dancing. Then I wanted to kiss the Doctor, but hearing Mrs. Shelfer's step, made a reckless jump and had it out upon her.

"Bless me, why bless me, my good soul, if I was a young gentleman now—"

"Why, Miss Valence, I am perfectly astonished," said Doctor Franks, but I knew he was laughing; "if I had been requested, only two minutes ago, to pick out the most self-possessed, equable, and courageous young lady in London, I should have said, 'I don't want any looking, I know where to find her,' but now, upon my word—"

"If you are asked to point out the most delighted, grateful, and happy girl in London, you know where to come for her. Let me kiss you, Dr. Franks, only once. I won't rob your daughters. It is to you I owe it all."

"No, to Providence, and yourself, and an uncommonly good conjunctiva. Now be prudent, my dear child; a little ecstasy must be forgiven; but don't imperil your cure by over-excitement. It is, as I hoped it would be, a case of epiphytic sloughing" (I think that was what he said), "and it may become chronic if precipitated. The longer and more thorough the process, the less chance of recurrence."

"Oh I am satisfied with one eye, or half an eye. Can you promise me that?"

"If you will only follow my directions, I can promise

you both eyes, more brilliant than ever; and Mrs. Shelfer says they were wonderfully bright. But what I order must be done. Slow and sure."

He gave me short directions, all upon the same principle, that of graduation.

"And now, Miss Valence, good-bye. Henceforth I visit you only as a friend; in which I know you will indulge me, from the interest I feel in the case, and in yourself. Mrs. Shelfer's wonderful young lady may be admitted on Thursday; but don't let her look at your eyes. Girls are always inquisitive. If there is any young gentleman, lucky enough to explain your strange anxiety to see, you will make short work of him, when your sight returns. Your eyes will be the most brilliant in London; which is saying a great deal. But I fear he will hardly know you, till your lashes grow; and all your face and expression are altered for the time."

"One thing will never alter, though it can find no expression, my gratitude to you."

"That is very pretty of you, my dear child. You kissed me just now. Now let me kiss you."

He touched my forehead and was gone. He was the first true gentleman I had met with, since the loss of Farmer Huxtable.

CHAPTER V.

When Isola came on the Thursday, and I obtained some little glimpse of her, she expressed her joy in a thousand natural ways, well worth feeling and seeing, not at all worth telling. I loved her for them more and more. I never met a girl so warm of heart. Many women can sulk for days; most women can sulk for an hour; I believe that no provocation could have made Isola sulky for two minutes. She tried sometimes (at least she said so), but it was no good.

And yet she felt as keenly as any of the very sulkiest women can do; but she had too much warmth of heart and imagination to live in the folds of that cold-blooded snake. Neither had she the strong selfishness, on which that serpent feeds.

In the afternoon, as we still sat together, in rushed Mrs. Shelfer with her bonnet on, quite out of breath, and without her usual ceremony of knocking at the

door. I could not think where she had been all the day; and she had made the greatest mystery of it in the morning, and wanted to have it noticed. Up she ran to me now, and pushed Isola out of the way.

"Got 'em at last, Miss. Got 'em at last, and no mistake. No more Dr. Franks, nor bandages, nor curtains down, nor nothing. Save a deal of trouble and do it in no time. But what a job I had to get them to be sure; if the cook's mate hadn't knowed Charley, they would not have let me had 'em, after going all the way to Wapping." She holds up something in triumph.

"What is it, Mrs. Shelfer? I am sorry to say I cannot see."

"And right down glad of it, I am, my good friend. Yes, yes. Or I should have had all my journey for nothing. But Miss Idols knows, I'll be bound she does, or it's no good going to College."

"Let me look at it first," says Isola, "we learn almost everything at college, Mrs. Shelfer; but even we senior sophists don't know everything without seeing it yet."

"Then put your pretty eyes on them, Miss Idols; I'll be bound it will make them caper. I never see

such fine ones, nor the cook's mate either. Why they're as big as young whelks."

"Mollusca, or crustacea, or something!" exclaims Isola, with more pride than accuracy, "what queer little things. I must take them to my papa."

"Now, young ladies," cried Mrs. Shelfer in her grandest style, "I see I must explain them to you after all. Them's the blessed shells the poor sailors put in their eyes to scour them out, and keep them bright, and make them see in the dark against the wind. Only see how they crawls. There now, Miss Valence, I'll pick you out two big lively fellows, and pop one for you in the corner of each eye; the cook's mate showed me how to lift your eyelids."

"How kind of him, to be sure!"

"And it will crawl about under the lid, you must not mind its hurting a bit; and it won't come out till to-morrow when the clock strikes twelve, and then it will have eaten up every bit, and your eyes will be brighter than diamonds. Charley has seen them do it ever so many times, and he says it's bootiful, and they don't mind giving five shillings a piece for them, when they are scarce."

"Did Mr. Shelfer ever try them? His eyes are so sharp: perhaps that is the reason."

"No. I never heard that he did, Miss. But bless you he never tells me half he does; no, nor a quarter of half." At this recollection, she fetches a little short sigh, her nearest approach to melancholy, for she is not sentimental. "Care killed the cat," is her favourite aphorism.

"Then when he comes home, Mrs. Shelfer, pop one of these shells, a good big one, into each of his eyes; and let us know the effect to-morrow morning, and I'll give you a kiss, if you do it well."

This is the bribe Isola finds most potent with everybody.

"Lor, Miss Idols, bless your innocent heart, do you suppose he would let me? Why he thinks it a great thing to let me tie his shoe, and he won't only when he has had a good dinner."

"Well," cries Isola, "I am astonished! Catch me tying my husband's shoes! I shall expect him to tie mine, I know; and he shall only do that when he is very good."

With a regal air, she puts out the prettiest foot ever seen. Mrs. Shelfer laughs.

"Lor, Miss, it's all very well for girls to talk; and they all does it, till they knows better. Though for the likes of you, any one would do anything a most. Pray, Miss Idols, if I may make so bold, how many offers of marriage have you received?"

"Let me think! Oh I know! it's one more than I am years old. Eighteen altogether, Mrs. Shelfer; if you count the apothecary's boy, and the nephew of the library; but then they were all of them boys, papa's pupils and that, a deal too young for me. They were all going to die, when I refused them; but they are all alive so far, at any rate. Isn't it too bad of them?"

"Well, Miss Idols, if you get as good a husband as you deserve, and that is saying a deal, he'll tie your shoe may be for a month, and then he'll look for you to tie his."

"And long he may look, even if he has shellfish in his eyes. Why look, Mrs. Shelfer, they're all crawling about!"

"Bootiful, isn't it? Bootiful! I wish Miss Valence could see them. And look at the horns they goes routing about with! How they must tickle your eyelids. And what coorious eyes they has! Ah, I often

think, Miss Idols, I likes this sort of thing so much, what a pity it is as I wasn't born in the country. I should never be tired of watching the snails, and the earywigs, and the tadpoles. Why, I likes nothing better than to see them stump-legged things come to table in the cabbage. I have not seen one now for ever so long. Oh that Charley, what dreadful lies he do tell!"

"What about, Mrs. Shelfer?"

"Why, my good friend, he says them green things with stripes on, and ever so many legs, turns to live butterflies, after they be dead. But I was too many for him there. Yes, yes. The last one as I boiled, I did not say a word about it to him, but I put it by in a chiney-teacup, with the saucer over, in case it should fly away. Bless your heart, young ladies, there it is now, as quiet as anything, and no signs of a butterfly. And when he tells me any lies, about where he was last night, I just goes to the cupboard, and shows him that; and never another word can he say. And so, Miss Valence, you won't try these little snails, after my journey and all!"

"Of course I won't, Mrs. Shelfer. But I am sincerely obliged to you for your trouble, as well as for all your

kind nursing, which I can never forget. Now let me buy those shellfish from you, and Miss Isola will take them as a present to her papa."

"No, no, unless he will put them in his eyes, Miss. I won't have them wasted. Charley will sell them again in no time. He knows lots of sailors. Most likely he'll get up a raffle for them, and win them himself."

Away she hurries to take off the bonnet she has been so proud of, for the last two and twenty years. Though I declined the services of the ophthalmist snails, my sight returned very rapidly. How delicious it was to see more and more every day! Plenty of cold water was the present regimen. Vision is less a vision, every time I use it. In a week more, I can see quite well, though obliged to wear a shade.

One morning, dear Isola runs upstairs, out of breath as usual; but, what is most unusual, actually frowning. Has Cora tyrannised, or what? Through the very shade of her frown, comes her sunny smile, as she kisses me.

"Oh, I am so vexed. I have brought him to the door; and now he won't come in!"

"Who, my darling?"

"Why, Conny, to be sure. My brother Conrad. I had set my heart on showing him to you, directly you could see."

"Why won't he come in?"

"Because he thinks that you ought not to see strangers, until you are quite well. He has not got to the corner yet. I can run like a deer. Send word by me, that you are dying to see him."

"Not quite that. But say how glad I shall be."

"I'll say that you won't get well till you do."

"Say what you like. He will know it's only your nonsense."

Off she darts; she is quick as light in her movements, and soon returns with her brother.

I lift my weak eyes to his bright ones, and recognise at once the preserver of my mother and myself. But I see, in a moment, that he has not the faintest remembrance of me. My whole face is altered by my accident, and even my voice affected by the long confinement. When he met me in the wood, he seemed very anxious not to look at me; when he saved my life from the rushing mountain, he had little opportunity. Very likely he would not have known me, under another

name; even without this illness. So let it be. I will not reveal myself. I thanked him once, and he repulsed me; no doubt he had a reason, for I see that he is a gentleman. Let that reason hold good: I will not trespass on it.

He took my hand with a smile, the counterpart of Isola's. He had heard of me so constantly, that I must excuse the liberty. A dear friend of his sister's could be no stranger to him. A thrill shot through me at the touch of his hand, and my eyes were weak. He saw it, and placed a chair for me further from the light. On his own face, not the sun, for the "drawing-room" windows look north, but the strong reflection of the noon-day light was falling.

How like he is to Isola, and yet how different! So much stronger, and bolder, and more decided, so tall and firm of step. His countenance open as the noon, incapable of concealment; yet if he be the same (and, how can I doubt it?), then at least there seemed to be some mystery about him.

Isola, with the quickness of a girl, saw how intently I observed him, and could not hide her delight.

"There now, Clara dear, I knew you would like him.

But you must not look at him so much, or your poor eyes will be sore."

Little stupid! As I felt my pale cheeks colouring, I could almost have been angry, even with my Isola. But she meant no harm. In spite of lectures and "college," she was gentle nature personified; and no Professors could make anything else of her. All these things run in the grain. If there is anything I hate, I am sure I hate affectation. But there is a difference between us.

Probably it is this: I am of pure English blood, and she is not. That I know by instinct. What blood she is of, I am sure I cannot tell. Gentle blood at any rate, or I could not have loved her so. How horribly narrow-minded, after all my objectivity! Well, what I mean is, that I can like and love many people who are not of gentle, but (I suppose) of ferocious blood; still, as a general rule, culture and elegance are better matches for nature, after some generations of training. My father used to say so about his pointers and setters. The marvel is that I, who belong to this old streak, seem to have got some twist in it. My grandmother would have swooned at the names of some people

I love more than I could have loved her. My mother would not. But then she was a Christian. Probably that is the secret of my twist.

All this has passed through my mind, before I can frown at Isola. And now I cannot frown at all. Dear little thing, she is not eighteen, and she knows no better. I have attained that Englishwoman's majority three weeks ago ; and I am sorry for Isola.

To break the awkwardness, her brother starts off into subjects of art. He has heard of my drawings, may he see them some day? I ask him about the magnificent stag. Yes, that is his, and I have no idea how long it took him to do. He speaks of it with no conceit whatever; neither with any depreciation, for the purpose of tempting praise. As he speaks, I observe some peculiarity in his accent. Isola's accent is as pure as mine, or purer. Her brother speaks very good English, and never hesitates for a word; but the form of his sentences often is not English; especially when he warms to his subject; and (what struck me first, for I am no purist as to collocation of words) his accent, his emphasis is not native. The difference is very slight, and quite indescribable; but

a difference there is. Perhaps it is rather a difference of the order of thought than of language, as regards the cast of the sentence; but that will not account for the accent; and if it would, it still shows another nationality.

There is a loud knock at the door. I am just preparing (with Isola's help) my little hospitalities. If London visits mean much talk and no food, I hold by Gloucestershire and Devon. I have a famous North Devon ham, and am proud of its fame. Surely no more visitors for me.

No; but one for Mrs. Shelfer. The Professor has heard of the eyeshells; and what politeness, humanity, love of his daughter failed to do, science has effected. He is come to see and secure them. His children hear his voice. Of course, we must ask him to come up. Mr. Conrad rises. Isola runs to fetch her father. Isola loves everybody. I do believe she loves old Cora. Conrad is of sterner stuff: but surely he loves his father. As for me—we were just getting on so well—I wanted no Professor. Isola's brother will not tell a lie. He does not remember, all at once, any pressing engagement. He holds out his hand, saying simply,

"Miss Valence, I heartily beg your pardon for leaving so suddenly; and just when we were giving you so much trouble. It would be impertinence for me to tell you the reason. It is a domestic matter. I trust you will believe me, that no light reason would make me rude. May I come again with Isola, to see your drawings soon?"

He meets the Professor on the stairs. The latter enters the room, under evil auspices for my good opinion.

CHAPTER VI.

If Professor Ross entered my room under evil auspices, it was not long before he sent the birds the other way. For the first time, since my childhood, I met a man of large and various knowledge; a man who had spent his life in amassing information, and learning how to make the most of it. A little too much perhaps there was of the second, and more fruitful branch, of the sour-sweet tree. Once I had been fool enough to fancy that some of my own little bo-peeps at nature were original and peculiar. To Thomas Henwood, Farmer Huxtable, and even Mr. Shelfer, a gardener, I had been quite an oracle as to the weather, the sky, and the insects about. Moreover, in most of the books I had read, there were such blunders, even in matters that lie on nature's doorsteps, that, looking back at them, I thought I had crossed her threshold.

As the proverb has it, nature always avenges herself; and here was I, a mere "gappermouth" (I use a Devonshire word), to be taught that I had not yet cropped even a cud to chew. True, I did not expect (like Mr. and Mrs. Shelfer) that a boiled caterpillar would become a live butterfly; neither did I believe, with Farmer Huxtable, that hips and haws foretell a hard winter, because God means them for the thrushes; but I knew no more than they did the laws and principles of things. My little knowledge was all shreds and patches. It did not cover even the smallest subject. Odd things here and there I knew; but a person of sound information knows the odd and the even as well. My observations might truly be called my own; but instead of being peculiar to me, nearly all of them had been anticipated centuries ago. I was but a gipsey straying where an army had been.

All this I suspected in less than ten minutes from the Professor's entrance; he did not leave me long in doubt about it. It is just to myself to say that the discovery did not mortify me much. My little observations had been made, partly from pure love of nature's doings, partly through habits drawn from a darker

spring. At first I had felt no pleasure in them, but it could not long be so. Now they were mine as much as ever, though a thousand shared them with me.

As the Professor laid bare my ignorance and my errors, and proved that the little I did know was at second hand—which it certainly was not—I attempted no reply; I was too young for argument, and too much interested to be impatient. So he demolished my ham and myself, with equal relish and equal elegance of handling. He seemed to have no intention of doing either, but managed both incidentally, and almost accidentally, while he opened his mental encyclopædia.

At length, Isola, who was tired of lectures, such as she got and forgot every day, felt that it was high time to assert her prerogative, and come to my rescue.

"Come, Pappy, you fancy you know everything, don't you?"

He was just beginning to treat of mosses; and I knew that he was wrong upon several points, but did not dare to say so.

"My dear child, of the million things I never shall discover, one is the way to keep you at all in order."

"I should hope not, indeed. Come now, here is

another thing you don't know. How long did it take to boil this delicious ham? Clara knows, and so do I."

"Upon that matter, I confess my total ignorance."

"Hear, hear! Pappy, you can lecture by the hour upon isothermic laws, and fluids, and fibrine, and adipose deposits, and you can't tell how long it took to set this delicate fat. I'll tell you what it is, Pappy if you ever snub me in lecture again before the junior sophists, as you dared to do yesterday, I'll sing out, 'Ham, Pappy, ham!' and you'll see how the girls will laugh."

"No novelty, my dear, for them to laugh at you. I fear you never will learn anything but impertinence."

His words were light, and he strove to keep his manner the same; but his eyes belied him.

Isola ran round, and administered her never-failing remedy. There was that sweetness about her nobody could resist it. Returning to her seat, she gave me a nod of triumph, and began again.

"Now, Papples, when you are good again, you shall have a real treat. Clara will show you her cordetto, won't you, dear? It is twice as big as yours, and more than twice as pretty."

I took it from my neck, where it had been throughout my illness. Isola told me continually that it had saved my sight; and so old Cora devoutly believed, crossing herself, and invoking fifty saints. Long afterwards I found that Cora knew it to be the heart of the Blessed Virgin, perpetuated in the material which her husband used. If so, it had been multiplied as well.

Dr. Ross took my pretty gordit, and examined it narrowly, carrying it to the window to get a stronger light.

"Beyond a doubt," he said at last, "it is the finest in Europe. I have only seen one to compare with it, and that had a flaw in the centre. Will you part with it, Miss Valence?"

"No; I have promised never to do that."

"Then I must say no more; but I should have been proud to add it to my collection."

"To carry it about with you, you mean, Pappy. You know you are a superstitious old Pappy, in spite of all your learning."

Weak as my eyes were, I could see the scowl of deep displeasure in his. Isola was frightened: she knew she had gone too far. She did not even dare to offer the kiss of peace. No more was said about

it, and I turned the conversation to some other subject. But when he rose to depart, I found a pretext for keeping Isola with me.

"Good-bye for the present, Miss Valence," Dr. Ross said gracefully—he did everything but scowl with an inborn grace—"I hope that your very first journey in quest of natural history will terminate at my house. I cannot show you much, but shall truly enjoy going over my little collection with you whenever you find that your sight is strong enough. Meanwhile, let me earnestly warn you to abstain from chemical experiments"—this was the cause of my injury assigned by Mrs. Shelfer—"until you have a competent director. Isola, good-bye. I will send Cora for you in good time for tea. Your attendance at lecture will be excused."

All my interest in the subjects he had discussed, and in his mode of treating them, all my admiration of his shrewd intellectual face, did not prevent my feeling it a relief when he was gone. He was not at all like his children. About them there was something so winning and unpretentious, few could help liking them at first sight. They did all they could to please, but without any visible effort. But with the

Professor, in spite of all his elegance and politeness, I could not help perceiving that he was not doing his best, that he scorned to put forth his powers when there was neither antagonist nor (in his opinion) duly qualified listener. Nevertheless I could have told him some things he did not know concerning lichens and mosses.

When I was left with my favourite Isola, that gentle senior sophist seemed by no means disconsolate at her Papa's departure. She loved him and was proud of him, but there were times, as she told me, when she was quite afraid of him.

"Would you believe it, dear, that I could be afraid of old Pappy?"—his age was about four and forty—"It is very wicked I know, but how am I to help it? Were you like that with your Papa, when he was alive?"

"No, I should think not. But I am not at all sure that he wasn't afraid of me."

"Oh, how nice that must be! But it is my fault, isn't it?"

I could not well have told her, even if I had known it, that the fault in such cases is almost always on the parent's side.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT same evening, when dear "Idols" was gone, and I felt trebly alone, Mrs. Shelfer came to say that her uncle John was there, and would be glad to see me. Though he had been several times to ask how I was, he had not seen me since the first day of my blindness.

After expressing his joy and surprise at my recovery, he assured me that I must thank neither myself nor the doctor, but my luck in not having touched the liquid until its strength was nearly expended.

"Have you any news for me?" I asked abruptly. As my strength returned, the sense of my wrong grew hotter.

"Yes; and I fear you will think it bad news. You will lose my help for awhile in your pursuit."

"How so? You talk of my luck; I am always unlucky."

"Because I am ordered abroad on a matter too nice

and difficult for any of my colleagues. To-morrow I leave England."

"How long shall you be away?"

"I cannot tell. Perhaps one year; perhaps two. Perhaps I may never return. Over and above the danger, I am not so young as I was."

I felt dismayed, and stricken down. Was I never to have a chance? All powers of earth and heaven and hell seemed to combine against me. Then came a gleam of hope, obscured immediately by the remembrance of his words.

"Are you going to Italy?"

"No. To Australia."

Thereupon all hope vanished, and for a time I could not say a word. At last I said—

"Inspector Cutting, the least thing you can do before you go, and your absolute duty now, is to tell me every single thing you found out, in the course of your recent search. Something you must have learned, or you would not have done what you did. All along I have felt that you were hiding something from me. Now you can have no motive. Now I am your successor in the secret; I, and no one else.

To no other will I commit the case. How much I have suffered from your secresy, none but myself can know. Henceforth I will have no help. Three months you have been on the track, and I almost believe that you have discovered nothing."

I spoke so, partly through passion, partly in hope to taunt him into disclosure. His chief weakness, as I knew well, was pride in his own sagacity.

"You shall suffer no more. I had good reasons for hiding it, one of them your own hastiness. Now I will tell you all I know. In fact, as you well said, it has become my duty to do so, unless you will authorise me to appoint a successor before I go."

"Certainly not. My confidence in you cannot be transferred to a stranger."

"One chance more. Let me report the matter officially. It is possible that my superiors may think it more important than my new mission, which is to recover a large amount of property."

"No. I will not allow it. I have devoted myself to one object. I alone can effect it. It shall not pass to others. I feel once more that it is my destiny to unravel this black mystery; myself, by my own

courage. In asking your aid I was thwarting my destiny. Since then I have had nothing but accidents. There is a proverb in some language, 'Who crosses destiny shall have accident.'"

"Miss Valence, I could never have dreamed that you were so superstitious."

"Now tell me all you have done, all you have discovered, and your own conclusion from it."

He told me all in a very few words, and his conclusion was mine. To any other except myself, the grounds on which he had based it, would have seemed insufficient. I took good care to secure every possible means of following up the frail clue. Ere he wished me good-bye, he offered one last suggestion. "If, during my absence, Miss Valence, you press your evidence far enough to require the strong hand, or if before you have done so you require a man's assistance, apply at once to my son—you can always find him through Patty Shelfer. He is only a serjeant as yet, and not in the detective force; but he has qualities, that young man has, he has got all my abilities, and more! Ah, he will be at the top of the tree when I am in my grave, please God."

His shrewd eyes softened as he spoke, and I liked him ten times as well for this little flaw in his sheathing. Of course he knew that I could not entrust myself to a young man, as I could to him. When he was gone, with many good wishes on both sides, and a little keepsake from me, I felt that I had lost an intelligent, honest, and true friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

Vigorous and elastic as I am, I cannot deny that the air and weather have great dominion over me. It was always so with my own dear father. Two days spent indoors, without any real exercise, would make him feel as uneasy as a plant in a cellaret. Crusty and crabbed, nothing could ever make him—not even gout I believe, if he had lived long enough for it—but when he had lost his fishing, or shooting, or bit of gardening, too long, he was quite unlike himself. It was a bad time then to coax for anything—no song, no whistling, no after-dinner nap.

I too am not of a sedentary nature, though upon due occasion I can sit writing or drawing for some hours together. But how fine a thing all the while to see any motion outside—a leaf that can skip, or a cloud that can run! How we envy a sparrow his little hop, even across the gutter. It is now a

long month since I have been out of doors, except just to sniff the air, without any bonnet on. I have never been boxed and pannelled so long since first I crawled out of my cradle. It is a sharp bright frost—it seems to freeze harder in London than in the west of Gloucestershire, but not half so cleanly.

Isola comes, like a tea-china rose bedded in poplin and ermine. Her close-drawn bonnet of velvet, mazarin blue, is freaked with snowdrops, nod, nod, nodding, not too many of them. I hail the omen of spring, and my spirits rise already. Idols is up for a lark (as the junior sophists express it) and she has set her heart upon leading me such a dance. Shall she ever set that sweet heart upon anything, and not obtain it at once? Who knows? Never, I am quite sure, when another heart is the object.

"Come, you grave old Grandmother. You are younger than me, I believe, in spite of all your stories; and you are old enough in your ways, for old mother Hubbard that lived in a cupboard. Oh my tippets and furbelows, if I were as tall as you, and half as long in the waist, what a dress I would have. Fifteen guineas at least. Come along, you bed-ridden dump of a Clara; it's

freezing like bricks and silica, and I am in such spirits, and Giudice is frightening Tom out of his life in the kitchen."

She danced round my little room, like a leaf when the wind is rising. The Pixie-king of my gordit could not have been lighter of foot, nor half so lovely of form. How she managed to spin so between the "sticks," none but herself can tell. What would poor Mrs. Shelfer have said? In spite of her fears for the furniture, she would have laughed, I believe, and blessed the pretty feet.

"Come along, Clara child. Do you think I am going to stand still here all day?"

"If you call that standing still, pray give me the senior sophist's definition of motion."

"Oh I want to skate, so dreadfully. And Pappy and Conrad won't let me. They say it isn't becoming. But what on earth can be more so? Wouldn't I skim on one foot? I'll skate, in spite of them, Clara, if you'll only keep me in countenance."

"Can you imagine me skating?"

"No. I know you won't do it, you are so fearfully grave. But there's more fun in you, when you like, or

when you can't help yourself, as I've seen you once or twice, than there is in a hundred such Merry-Andrews as me. At any rate we'll go and see them. On with your bonnet now, I cannot wait a minute. Have something to cover your eyes. Conny 'll be there I know."

On went my bonnet, nothing loth to have an airing again. It was fading in the box.

"Now lots of warm things, darling. You have no idea how cold it is, and scarcely sun enough to thaw the long frost in your eyes. Let me look at them, Donna. Oh if mine were half as bright. You can't have got them in England."

"Now, Idols, don't talk nonsense. Every inch of me is English, and not an inch of you; although your eyes are so blue. You are Scotch all over, or else you are all Swiss."

For answer she began singing "the Merry Swiss Boy," and was going to dance to her song, when I danced her off down stairs. Giudice was in the kitchen, with Tom, from the top of the coffee-mill, sputtering anathemas at him. A magnificent dog he was, of the race of Maltese bloodhounds, now so scarce, fawn-coloured, long in the flank, deep in the jowl, pouch-eared, and grave of eye.

He regarded Tom no more than if he had been an old hat brushed the wrong way; and the birds, who were all in a flutter, he took for British butterflies. He came leisurely to me, walking one side at a time, and solemnly deposited his great moist nose in my hand. I knew him then as the friend who addressed me, long since, in the Villa Road.

"Why, you graven images"—a popular person always has fifty nicknames; Isola had a hundred at least, and she liked them all—"what depth of secresy and state-craft is this! You know how I love dogs, and you never even told me of this splendid fellow's existence!"

"Well, Donna dear, don't look so indignant. He doesn't belong to me, and he won't come with me unless he is told, and then he makes such a favour of it. See his long supple stride. He walks just like a leopard—don't you, you pious panther? I wonder he took to you so. He is not fierce at all, except when he ought to be; but he hardly ever makes friends."

"Whose dog is he?"

"Conrad's to be sure. And I do believe Conny thinks more of him than he does of me. Get along, you yellow mammoth! Why he would keep his head there all day?"

"All dogs love me, Idols. It was so when I was a child. They know how honest I am."

"Well, I believe you are, Donna; and too honest sometimes. But I am honest enough, and Giudice does not appreciate it. Come along, Judy. Are you going to stick there all day?"

Away we went, and the great dog walked behind, keeping his head most fairly adjusted between us, never shifting its place an inch, whether we walked or ran—as we did where the street was empty, and when we got into the Park.

Oh the cold air of heaven, fresh from the clear North Pole, where the Great Bear stalks round the Little Bear with the vigilance of a mother, how it tightens the clip of the joints, puts a sting into every step, flushes the cheeks with Aurora, and sparkles in young eyes! For the nonce we forget who we are, never think how our clothes blow about, our spirits are on the north wind, what are we more than snow flakes, let us glisten and lift on the air.

Crossing the Park (lightly furrowed with snow at the drains, like our hair when we part it) we came to a broad sheet of ice. We had heard a long way off a

crisp musical hollow sound, like tapping a box with a hole in it. The ice was not like the old ice at Vaughan Park, but seamed and channeled, and up and down, and powdered light grey with scrapings from skates and shoes. Thousands of people were on it, some skating, some sliding, some rushing about and playing hot game with crooked sticks, some sweeping away with short brooms, some crying things for sale and offering skates for hire, many standing still and wistfully eyeing the land ; but all in the height of good humour, laughing, chaffing, holloaing, drinking, and ordering more. Every now and then some great performer (in his own eyes) would sail by the women grandly (like a ship heeling over), with his arms folded and foot over foot, and a long cigar in his mouth. For these one devoutly desired a fall. The skaters of real eminence scorned this common show-off, and each had his special admirers forming a ring around him, where he had cut his own circus of smoother and greener ice.

Along the brink of firm land, stood nurses and children innumerable ; the maids on the giggle at every challenge borne to them from the glazed waters, the little ones tugging, and kicking, and frantic to get on. The back-

ground of all the cold scene, whiter as it receded, and broken by gliding figures, was formed by some low fringed islets, with open water around them, and crane-necked wild fowl wheeling about, and warning boards, and icemen pushing flat-bottomed boats along. In the far distance, to the right, were two or three canvas tents, where they kept the range of the mercury, and the list of the accidents. The long vista was closed now and then, as high as hats and bonnets, by scuds of the drifting ice and snow.

Here as we stood on the bank, Giudice forsook us shamefully, and bounded over the ice, with a levity quite scandalous for a serious-minded dog, towards one of the charmed circles, where eminent skaters whirled, like peg-tops full of steam-engines. Was it likely that we, two girls of spirit, would halt ignobly there? First on the ice went I, holding Isola's hand, and tempting her nothing loth. In spite of her boast about skating, Idols was frightened at first, and held very tightly by me, and wanted to run back. But the little feet grew braver at every step, and she ventured even to clap her hands and dance. To me the thing was no novelty, except from the number of people, and the puckering of

the ice. I had even the courage to slide with one foot, but never with both at a time. As for the cracking and bending when some heavy man scoured by, on purpose, I dare say, to frighten us, I laughed with my heart in my mouth. Isola was amazed. She never could have conceived that I had so much effrontery. What cared I, if a hundred people stared at me? I was doing nothing unseemly, and dozens of ladies were there. The scene, and the air, and the spirits of youth set my blood all on the bound, and oh, blessing of blessings, my blessed sight was come back. How manly, and stirring, to feel, that a slip—and a limb may be broken; a crack —and one may be drowned.

But, as usual, I suffered for my temerity. First we followed Giudice, and found him in the centre of the ring, where the greatest throng was gathered, the dog skating with his master, who was one of the very best skaters in the world. Giudice was graver than ever, but wistfully glanced as he whirled round, at every point of escape. With his heavy fore feet on his master's shoulders, and his tongue lolling out, and his eyes rolling sadly at each reluctant caper, and his poor tail between his jerked legs, it was impossible not to see

that his dignity and self-respect were suffering. So when Conrad came to speak to us, I earnestly begged that Giudice might be set free, which was done in a moment, to the great disappointment of the bystanders, and the boundless delight of the dog, who came and gratefully kissed my hand.

"Why, Donna," cried Isola in a small pet, "Giudice takes you for his mistress: he would never do that to me, if I coaxed him a hundred years."

Through the colour the north wind had spread on my cheeks, I felt the warm blood rushing, and bent over the dog to hide it; then much as I longed to see Isola's brother skate, I dragged her off rather rudely towards the rougher part of the ice. Conrad looked rather surprised and hurt, but resumed his figuring with much apparent philosophy.

Idols and I, with the flush in our cheeks, and the flash in our eyes, and our forms all buoyant with innocent fun, came suddenly round a corner on a party of low-looking men, who were casting flat stones, bowling, or curling, or playing at drake, with a great tin can for their mark. We turned and were off in a moment; but we had been observed by the sharpest

and slyest eyes in London. A man gave chase in half-skating fashion, having bones tied under his boots, in lieu of skates. We could easily have escaped, in spite of his bones; but was I going to run away, like a skittish servant-maid? I drew up Miss Isola sharply, whether she would or no, and confronted the enemy. It was Mr. Shelfer himself, the man so modest and bashful, who could never bear to look at me. Though a dozen more came after him, I felt no alarm at all, knowing his wonderful shyness and diffidence. But his first address amazed me.

"Now's your time, lads. At 'em, I say. Here's the two prettiest gals in London."

The low scoundrel! I saw that he was quite tipsy. But frightened as I was, for none but they were near, I could hardly help laughing at him. He had his usual slouch, and the long sly nose, and the pent-house gleam of the eye, and his gaunt cheeks drawn as if he was always sucking them, and the chimneypot hat, that had once belonged to some steady going Churchman, with the crown flapping in, like the gills of a fish. All this was balanced by the skill and comical courage of Bacchus, upon a pair of grating marrow-bones. Behind

him his countless pockets yawned and looked brown on the wind. And this was the being bowed down to by Mrs. Shelfer!

"Clara dear, stop, Clara!" the impudent sot cried out.

I had stopped without that, and was already facing him. For a moment he was abashed, for my eyes were full upon his; but the others were coming up.

"Now this is what I calls harmony, dashed if it isn't. Why look at the trees and the bushes. There's harmony in them trees, ay in every one on 'em. Fine trees and pretty gals, them's the jockeys for me. That's what I calls natur' and something like. Houses! Lor, there's no harmony in houses and pantiles. Fine trees is all harmony, and so is lovely woman. Don't tell the old gal at home. She never would understand. Why Idols there is a pretty duck as ever swam on the ice. But Clara's a —— fine swan, and no mistake. Ducks is all very well, but a swan is the jockey for me. There's something to lay hold on there. Give me a swan I say, and the harmony of them trees. Bob Ridley, I'll lay you a tanner I kisses that there swan. Ever see such eyes, Bob, and look at the way she stands. Wonder there's a bit of ice left here."

The low rogue had a long pipe "in his head,"—as Farmer Huxtable expressed it,—and at every leering sentence blew out a puff of smoke.

"Bet you a tanner, Charley, you don't kiss that stunnin' gal," cried his friend, as drunk as himself.

"Here goes, neck or nothing;" and the niddering made a dash at me. I drew my clenched hand from my muff, where it had been tingling in my glove, and in his tipsy rush, his face came full against it. It was a very odd thing, and I know not how it happened. He reeled on his bones from the collision, and staggered in staring amazement. Before he had time to recover, Conrad dashed up like a hawk at an owl; by some wonderful back-stroke he stopped in an instant, wrung Shelfer's crooked stick from his hand, hooked him under the collar, struck out again, and towed the poor wretch away backward, at the speed of a mile in a minute. The fire flew from his skates as he dashed towards the open water. Giudice, at full gallop behind, tried in vain to keep up. Every man and woman there turned to watch the issue. Shelfer threw out his hands wildly, and screamed: he was utterly helpless, his teeth rattled more than the bones on his

boots. At the edge of the open water, three hundred yards away, Conrad stopped suddenly, like an engine in collision, unhooked Mr. Shelfer, and let him go with full impetus. Sprawling and yelling in vain, he flung up his arms, and fell backward into the water headlong. The icemen came running with boats, and ropes, and grapnels. But before the first splash was over, another was seen; Giudice, at a sign from his master, plunged in, drew the poor man of harmony out, and laid him high and wet on the ice. He was taken at once to the tent; where, as I afterwards heard, he made a fine afternoon of it with the society's men; most of whom, it is needless to say, he knew. Be that as it may, the lesson did him good. He never insulted a lady again, or (what is still worse) a poor honest girl, with no education, and no one to defend her. As for me, I really believe he never durst blink his sly eyes in my direction again.

I love good justice, in or out of the pod. The bean is as sweet to me from the rough air of heaven as from a juryman's pocket. But I thought Master Conrad had overdone it this time. He had no right to risk the poor man's life. And so I told him when he came

back, as calm as if he had cut a spread eagle. He assured me that he had not risked the man's life at all. He knew the depth of the water there by the island. It was five feet and no more. Then I felt all of a glow and longed to give him the kiss which had cost Mr. Shelfer so much. The next minute I felt humiliated, and burst into a passion of tears, to think what my father would say at his pet of grace and luxury being insulted like that. Idols and Conrad, not knowing my story, could not understand it at all.

They came home with me at once. Conrad, "under the circumstances," ventured to offer his arm, which I, under the circumstances, ventured to accept. At the door he left me; but Idols came in with Giudice, commissioned to see her safe home. She came in partly lest I should feel lonely, partly to arraign Mrs. Shelfer (already condemned by both of us girls) for daring to have such a reprobate drunken husband.

CHAPTER IX.

When Isola had told Mrs. Shelfer everything, and a little more than everything (for her imagination was lively), the dominant feeling in the little woman's bosom was not indignation, as we had expected, but terror. Terror of two evils; the first and chief evil, the possibility of Charley catching cold; the other, the probability that he would crush Conrad, and tread him into the earth, at the earliest opportunity. I assured her warmly that Mr. Conrad could well defend himself, even if Shelfer should dare to meddle with him.

"Oh, my good friend, you have no idea what a terrible fellow Charley is. Why he broke the head of the skittleman at the "Load of Hay." So he told me himself. Ah, he's a terrible fellow, when he's put out."

"But you forget, Mrs. Shelfer, he hasn't been put

out this time; he was put in." That Isola always loved small jokes.

"Put in, Miss Idols?"—Mrs. Shelfer never understood any joke but her own—"oh yes, put into the water you mean. True, true, and serve him right (so long as he don't take cold) for calling me, his lawful wife who keeps him together, 'the old gal at home!' But Charley's a terrible fellow, terrible."

"Terrible coward more likely," I cried, "or he would never have dared his low insolence to me. I am sorry for it, Mrs. Shelfer, utterly as I scorn him, because it compels me to leave your house; and you have been truly good and kind to me." I thought of Mrs. Huxtable; but how different was the fibre of her kindness!

"Leave my house, Miss Valence! No, no, my good friend, that will never do, not to be thought of, and us so used to you and all, and Tom, and the blackbird, and the new squirrel! A likely story, my good friend, and with your eyelashes coming! And do you know who would come instead of you?"

"Of course not, Mrs. Shelfer."

"Why a nasty stinking hussy, that would steal the

feathers out of my best bed again, the same as they did before. My very best bed, Miss Idols, as dear Miss Minto left me by her will, not a better bed in London, unless it's the Queen's, and so I used to tell her when I helped to shake it up. My mouth watered over it so, that she said one day, and the knife-boy heard her on the stairs, 'Patty, you've been a good girl to me, and you deserves it, and you shall have it, when I am tucked up for good and all.' And so I did, very honourable, and all above board. Yes, yes; I had a commercial gent one time, a wonderful heavy man to be sure, and he stayed with me three year for the sake of that same bed. And he knew what beds was, and no mistake. It was bootiful to see when he was a getting up. It began to rise up, up, the same as Tom's back, when he see your dog, Miss Idols."

"Come, Mrs. Shelfer, I fear we can hardly wait."

"'Twas like dough put afore the fire, Miss. There's no such Dantzic now. You couldn't put your fist into one side of it, but out it would come the other. Oh Lor, I could cry; that nasty sly minx, she was softer than parsnips, you'd say, and one leg more than the

other. I couldn't think why it was she would always make her own bed. 'Thank you, Mrs. Shelfer'—with her lips sucked in like a button-hole—'thank you, you are too kind. It doesn't at all fatigue me, and my doctor pronounces the exercise good for my chest and arms.' Thank God, she got some exercise good for her legs as well. Six months on the treadmill. Charley got me an order, and it did my heart good to see her. But my twenty pounds of best feathers never came back again, and that wasn't the worst of it neither."

"Oh dear no," says Idols, "the worst of it was the sin, Mrs. Shelfer."

"The worst of it was that she stuffed it with sawdust, and oakum, and jovanna, I do believe, by the smell of it."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Shelfer?"

"Lor, Miss Valence, don't you know jovanna that the kingfishers lays on the top of the sea, and the gardeners make water with it?"

"And what did she do with your feathers?"

"Sneaked them out of the house in the crown of her bonnet, and sold them at eightpence a pound, and they worth three and sixpence, every flue of them. But

the rag and bottleman got two months, thank God for it. Ah, it will never be a bed again under 5*l.* at least."

"Is it the one I sleep on, Mrs. Shelfer?"

"Yes, my good friend, the very same."

"And you have put me to sleep on guano! Well, I thought it smelt very odd."

"No, no, my good friend, wait a bit. We got most of that out again, and gave it to our geraniums. She stole it out of a sack as Charley kept in the washhouse. There was feathers in it. That put it into her head, I suppose. But as for your going, Miss Valence, that will never do. Never, never. Will it now, Miss Idols? And to see her dress, to be sure, that baggage! Why, my best tarlatan, as dear Miss Minto give me to be married in, wasn't good enough for her to sweep the stairs in. Sweep the stairs—yes, yes, she did sweep the stairs when I see her last; and she had afore, I know; she was so clever at it; and that was why one leg was so much more than the other."

"Mrs. Shelfer, do you expect us to listen to you all night?"

"True, my good friend, quite true. But when I thinks of my feathers, something comes over me, I

must out with my troubles, or burst. But you musn't go, Miss Valence. That will never do, never; ask Miss Idols now." And she turned to Isola, who was quite ready to be turned to.

"Of course it won't, Mrs. Shelfer. You are quite right, my good friend. I won't hear of it for a moment. Why Mr. Shelfer was drunk. I know it by the way he held his pipe. Quite 'drunk and incapable,' you know. And he will be so sorry, and he'll never do it again. And he did not mean to be drunk at all, but the frost was very hard, and the cold got into his head. I am sure it would into mine, if I had stayed much longer; and he didn't understand brandy-balls, as we do at College—you could not expect it, you know."

The pure good faith of this last was too much for me. I laughed outright, having no husband concerned in it. As for the dry little woman, she actually cried. I had never seen a tear in her quick, shy eyes before, though the feather-bed nearly brought them, and so did the death of the elder Sandy, the squirrel. She turned away. She was always ashamed of emotion.

"Bless your innocent heart, Miss Idols, if you don't marry a king! Not one of us is good enough to tie

your shoes as you talked of, you are that simple and good of heart."

Is there any goodness more touching to a veteran than a soft young nature's disbelief in evil? But for bitter experience, I might have been sweet as Isola. Thank God, that in spite of all vinegar, the ailment is still infectious. Isola could not make it all out.

"To-morrow morning, Miss Valence," began Mrs. Shelfer again, "to-morrow morning, after I have wigged him well all night, and then given him a good breakfast, he'll come and beg your pardon like a child, and be ashamed to look any higher than your flounces; and I know you'll forgive him."

"Mrs. Shelfer, I have forgiven him long ago. I cannot bear enmity against such people"—these last three words had better been away—"for such little wrongs. And I owe you a great deal for all your kindness to me. The only question is, whether self-respect and prudence allow me to stay here. I will leave the decision to Miss Isola. Young as she is, and innocent and confiding, she cannot be wrong on a question of delicacy. As for prudence, she knows more of London than I do."

Hereon I sat down with a womanly air. But I could hardly help laughing when the senior sophist jumped up, proud to deliver judgment. To look taller, she shook her flounces down, threw back her plump white shoulders—her bonnet and cloak were off—drew her rich flowing hair down the pearly curve of her ears and, scarcely satisfied yet, thought of mounting a stool, then took her foot off the too convictive bema. After all these anabolisms, she began with much solemnity. She was thinking of the College, and her father in the rostrum.

"Miss Valence and Mrs. Shelfer, since you have honoured my weak judgment by appointing me umpire, and as I am led to believe without any right of appeal, I will do my utmost to be discreet and impartial. In the first place I award that Miss Valence remain in this house, forget and forgive her wrongs. In the second place I recommend (in such a matter I will not presume to command) that till Mr. Shelfer has made a humble apology and promised faithfully never to be intoxicated again, however cold the weather is, Mrs. Shelfer shall not permit him to have a single kiss, nor a single bit of hot dinner. Now I have delivered my decree."

"Lor, Miss Idols, you are too soft for the Old Bailey. He never kiss me, unless it is when he knows I have got some money. But he do like a good hot dinner. Right enough there, my good friend."

So this knotty point was settled; and Giudice, who was very loth to leave me, escorted Miss Idols home. Before going, he made another solemn deposit of his great jowl in my hand, and looked at me with an air so tutelary and encouraging, that I could not help laughing; at which he felt hurt, but condoned it. Isola told me that when he was put in charge of her, he felt the responsibility so strongly that he would not stir from her side, not even to speak to the most colloquially gifted dog; though at other times he would stay gossiping near a lamp-post for five minutes together. One evening when he was thus commissioned, a rude fellow pushed between them, and said something to Isola. Giudice had him down in an instant, and stood over him, like a tawny thundercloud, with growlings so fearful and such flashing eyes, that two policemen felt it wiser not to act as conductors. Idols herself was obliged, at the entreaty of her prostrate foe, to coax the great dog off; but when the ungrateful man got up,

he insisted on giving Giudice into charge, and having him dragged to the Station. "Very good, Sir," said the policeman, "we'll enter the charge when you bring him there; let him go, Miss, for the Gent to collar him." The "Gent" was away in no time, and Giudice and his mistress walked off amid loud hurrahs from all the boys of the neighbourhood.

Conrad called with his sister the day after Mr. Shelfer's ducking, to reassure himself as to my nerves, which were never better. He looked over some of my drawings, and without seeming to give, but rather to seek information, afforded me many a hint, which I afterwards found most useful. I now learned what his profession was; and it gave me pleasure to find that he was not, as I had feared, a mere lounger upon town. Instead of that, he was working very hard, being (as he told me) nothing more or less than a journeyman sculptor. Though, as himself admitted, by no means a novice, he was going through the regular course of study and hand-labour under an eminent artist. But Isola told me, and no doubt it was true, that he could beat his master out and out, and that for any choice design, where original power

and taste were needed, they always came to him. Of late the frosts had lightened his tasks; for warm the room as they would, the weather always affected the material; and they feared to attempt the more delicate parts of the work during the rigours of winter. So when the thaw came, he must lose the pleasure of seeing me for a while, unless dear Isola wished to be escorted home on a Sunday; if, indeed, I allowed her to come on that day. Why, that was the very day when I could best indulge in a walk with my gentle friend, after going to church; and I was sure her society did me more good than the sermons. On her part, Isola found that the services always made her so nervous (her nerves were as good as mine), and that she did not much like walking about with a big dog on Sundays, and Cora was always cross all the day after mass, so Conrad must promise upon his honour always to come for her, rain, hail, or shine, on a Sunday. This he promised so readily, that, for a moment, I fancied it had all been preconcerted. Then I despised myself for the suspicion. The trick would have been not out of the compass of Isola, but very unworthy of Conrad.

CHAPTER X.

Soon as ever my sight was fully restored, and I had Dr. Frank's permission, I took to my drawing again, and worked at it till my eyes ached. This was the symptom upon which I had promised immediately to leave off. Then out I would rush, towards dusk, and away into the great square, full of the pure air of heaven, round by the church at the top, and six times round it till my breath was short. The senior sophist reminds me that round a square is impossible. After squaring the circle, extract the square root, dear Idols, by the binomial theorem. You do learn so much at college: but I write simple and often foolish English. Never mind; I would rather write bad English, than the best French ever written. One is the tongue of power and multitude: the other the language of nicety and demarcation. Which of the two is the more expansive, even a woman may guess.

High time it was for me to recruit my exchequer. Dr. Franks had charged me far less than I even dared to hope. How I trembled when I opened the envelope! What quick terror is half so bad as the slow fear of gathering debt? I was accustomed to medical charges of the time when I was an heiress: but his appeared to me now to be even below reason. The sum could hardly have paid him for his numerous walks to and fro. Then a wretched idea shot through me: had he charged me so little, because he knew I was poor? I took Mrs. Shelfer into my confidence; she was likely to know what the London scale should be. The little thing soon reassured me: it was quite enough, she declared; if she were in my place, she would demand a discount for ready money!

"Oh you dreadfully mean little woman! I should lose my sight, and deserve it, if I did."

However, in spite of all this, money was scarce and scarcer every day, and none of my grand revenues would fall due for ever so long. So another visit must be paid to Mr. Oxgall. Isola insisted on coming with me; to my surprise I found that, with all her soft simplicity, she had much more idea of making a market than I had. The reason probably was that she had much less pride.

No pocket would hold mine, when a tradesman attempted any familiarity. And whoso stands on a pedestal to sell, is like to find the buyer's arm too short.

Whether it were that, or the golden charm of her manner, or of something else, let Mr. Oxgall say; certain it is that the man of crackly canvas (for whom, by-the-bye, I have a sincere respect, because he cheated me so little and so neatly)—this man, I say, regarded her with a wide-mouthed, brooch-eyed, admiration, which he hardly ever expended on anything out of oils. For the king of painters himself she was a vision sweeter than dreams of heaven. Such a tint in her lustrous eyes, such tone in her dainty cheeks, such perfection of line in her features, and every curve of her exquisite shape. And bounding and sparkling through all, from the rippled wealth of her hair to the light-curved arch of her foot, the full play of her innocent, joyous, loving life.

No wonder the picture-dealer shaded his eyes and gazed, and rubbed them and gazed again. I have frequently seen respectable elderly gentlemen, whose rakishness has never been more than found vent in the cock of a hat, magisterial men I mean, who would no more think

of insulting a girl in London or anywhere else, than of giving their daughters as prizes for competitive skill in poaching, such good men and true, also simple-hearted clergymen (for some there still are from the country) these and the like, I Clara Vaughan have seen, when they met my Isola, stop short, wink frequently, and without much presence of mind, until she was gone by ; then shumble hotly across the street, with hands in their tail-coat pockets (for these gentlemen always expect most to be robbed when there is least chance of it) pretend to look at a shop, then march at top speed, fumbling all the while for their spectacles, until they got well a-head of us. Then I have seen them cross again, some thirty yards in front, with spectacles nicely adjusted, and become again wholly absorbed by the beauty of metropolitan goods. But when the light foot sounded, from a fair gazing distance, these same gentlemen have (by some strange coincidence) alway turned full upon us, in an absent and yet nervous manner, and focussed their green or pale blue eyes upon the rich violet orbs of Isola. I have even known them to look at me (when they could see her no more), to find some sympathy for their vague emotions. Idols knew it : of course she did. And she rather

gloried in it. She had much respect for a fine old gentleman; and I know not how it was, but nobody ever thought of insulting her when she could be clearly seen.

A "pretty girl" you would never call her—though Mr. Shelfer did—the term would be quite unworthy; even a "beautiful girl," sweetly beautiful though she was, would hardly be your expression, at least for a while. But a "lovely girl," and the loveliest one ever seen, that is what she would be called at once, if you could take your eyes off, to analyse your ideas.

Isola knew it of course, as I said before, she knew all her wondrous gifts; but as for being conceited, a trull with a splay foot and a crop of short-horn carrots has often thrice her conceit. A certain pretty graceful pride she had, which threw a rosy playful halo round her, but never made other women look plain in her eyes. She will not value her beauty much, until she falls in love; and blessed is he who shall be the object, if she is allowed to abide with him.

Meanwhile Mr. Oxgall wished for nothing but to hear and see her talk; and this she did to some purpose. I like a man who at the age of sixty is still impressible to

the gay vein of youth. I know at once by his eyes whether his admiration is abstract and admissible. If it be, I reciprocate it. What clearer proof can we find, that his heart has not withered with his body ; that he is not a man of mammon, tinsel, or phylactery,—in a word, no mummy ?

Shall I ever finish this bargain ? I have never been so reflective before ; and all the time no less a sum than five pounds hangs upon it. Five guineas (which sounds better) was the amount at which dear Idols let off Mr. Oxgall. I believe she might have got ten, but she had an excellent conscience. It worked like a patent chronometer, with compensation balance. Mine was still more sensitive. I could hardly think my landscape, perspective mare's nest and all, worth that amount of money, and I wished to throw off a guinea, but Idols would not hear of it.

"Miss Valence, I am your factor for this beautiful landscape, which has cost you so much labour. Either accept my terms, inadequate as they are, or take the agency from me, and recommence with Mr. Oxgall 'de novo,' as we say at College."

Betwixt her beauty and my stately integrity, poor

Mr. Oxgall knew not where he stood. I heard him mutter that he would rather go through fifty auctions, even if it was George Robins. But if she had come to sell him a picture the very next day, he would have gone through it all again with the same infatuation. So I took the money; and now my evil demon, who had chafed beneath all this trampling, had his turn again. We had foolishly brought the great dog Giudice, for our delight and the expansion of his mind. In Mr. Oxgall's shop he behaved to admiration. With the air of a connoisseur he walked from picture to picture, closed one eye, and faintly wagged his tail. Then he found a Scotch terrier scarcely worth a sniff, and a mastiff whom he saluted with a contemptuous growl. The only work of high art he could discover was an interior, with a flitch of bacon in the foreground uncommonly well drawn. Before this he sat down, and receiving no invitation, bedewed the boards with a stalactite from either side of his mouth. The dog was so well behaved, he never took anything without leave and saying a long grace.

Unluckily Mr. Oxgall, mainly I believe to prolong his interview with Idols, insisted upon taking us to the shop of a carver and gilder close by; where my

first drawing (which had been sold) was to be seen in its frame. He declared that we could not tell what a painting was like, until we had seen it framed. Observing several large mirrors in this shop, I begged that Giudice might be left outside. And so he was, but he did not stay there. Scarcely had we begun to discuss the effect of the frame on my drawing, when Giudice pushed his way in, and looked about with a truly judicial air. The shop was long, and the owner was with us at the further end. I saw what would follow, and dashed off to stop him, but it was too late. Giudice had seen the very finest dog he ever beheld in his life—a dog really worth fighting. Up went his crest and his tail, one savage growl, and he sprang at him. Crash,—and the largest mirror there was a wreck, and Giudice the rock beneath it. For a time he lay quite stunned; then to my great delight he staggered to me, not Isola, laid his cut paws in my hands and his bleeding nose in my lap, and explained it all to me with much entreaty for sympathy. This I gave him readily, even to tears and kisses. Isola wanted to scold and even to beat him, but I would not hear of it. He had seen another great dog between

himself and us, how could he help attacking him? I ordered a sponge and some water at once, and bathed his fore paws, which were terribly cut; then remembering the Inspector, I sent Idols for some arnica. But the blood was not stanched by it as I expected; perhaps the drug was not pure, or the hair obstructed its action. So I held his paws in the basin, and he whinged, and licked me, and made my face all bloody.

Meanwhile the poor carver and gilder thought much more of his looking-glass than of noble flesh and blood. The picture-dealer as well was in a great predicament.

"Mr. Oxgall," I cried, still sponging the wounded dog's nose, "let us hear no more about it. Tell me the full value of the mirror, and I will pay for it. What are glass and quicksilver, or even gold, compared to a noble dog like this? Not worth a wag of your tail, are they, my duck of diamonds? Give me another kiss, you delicious pet of a dog."

The delicious dog was entirely of my opinion. His beautiful eyes were unhurt. His nose tasted wholesomely salt. But Isola was not half so romantic. Little she cared about money for herself; yet she had no idea

of seeing a friend disburse. Empowered by nature to wind all men round her finger, she now called art to her aid, and Mr. Oxgall, who was half-way round already, had no chance of escape.

She settled it thus: the carver and gilder, in consideration of his dealings with Mr. Oxgall and his own "careless exposure" of the mirror, should accept cost price for the article. That amount should be paid in equal shares by all three of us: by Mr. Oxgall because he would drag us thither, by herself as the mistress of the dog, and by me as the cause of the expedition. She had attended a course of lectures upon jurisprudence, and her decision was better than that of a judge, because she had seen the whole of it, and because the dog was hers—at least her brother's, which was all the same. As for the owner of the mirror, he must think himself wonderfully lucky in having met with such honest people, and in having sold his glass, and hadn't he got all the pieces, and she must have the largest one for Judy to dress his hair by. And so indeed she did.

After our dear Portia had finished, and the whole thing was settled, it struck me that no lectures upon

jurisprudence could turn wrong into right. Mr. Oxgall was quite blameless, so was I, so was Idols, except in bringing unlucky Giudice with her, which, from the outset, I had discouraged. She, as the temporary owner of the dog, should have borne all the loss ; and so she would have done gladly, only she did not see it in that light. As it was, she tried afterwards to force upon me her last three guineas (that being the sum which I had paid, as my third of the whole), but of course I would not accept them. She had no money with her, so I paid her contribution, but allowed her to repay me. Mr. Oxgall's third I made good to him (without consulting her) when he paid me for my next drawing. So I had earned five guineas, and lost six. Is it always to be so when I labour to make a little money ?

At my earnest entreaty—Idols could refuse me nothing, when I was in earnest—darling Giudice was brought home in a cab to my lodgings. I knew that he would not be cared for at the stables where he was boarded ; and his wounds were very serious. As for home, Professor Ross, who detested dogs in general, would not admit him into the house. He even thought

it a great stretch of grace to allow old Cora to watch the dog back to the stables, after he had been patrolling all the afternoon with his mistress. How I hate such low ingratitude! An animal is to serve us, body and soul, to crouch and fawn for our notice—not that Giudice ever fawned to him, but growled awfully—and we are to think it well off with a curse or a kick, which we durst not give it but for its loyalty to us.

What pleasure I had in nursing that poor Giudice, and how grateful he was! When we got home, I washed his wounds again, with warm water this time, as the bleeding was stanched; and then I "exhibited" (as the doctors absurdly say) a little friar's balsam. "Oh, it does smart so!" Giudice exclaimed with his eyes, "but I know it's for the best, and you won't see me give one wince." Neither did I. Then a nice soft bandage over his lovely paws, and a plaister across his nose, and he lies snugly, at the proper distance from the fire, as proud as possible of being nursed, and with an interesting air of pallid refinement on his features. He will hardly notice Idols, but exclaims, at length, with the petulance of an invalid, "Isola, can't you let

me alone? Clara understands a dog, and I like her much the best." So he followed me all round the room with his eyes, and begged me to come and talk to him, which I would not do, because he needed quiet and composure.

CHAPTER XI.

Beloved Giudice remained many days under my care, until he became convinced that he was my dog absolutely, and had no claim on any other human being. He more than paid for his board and medical attendance, by sitting repeatedly for his portrait; in which at last I succeeded to his and my own satisfaction. Though by no means a conceited dog, there was nothing he loved better than having his likeness taken; and directly after breakfast he always assumed the most becoming attitude, and watched intently for the appearance of the pencil. With his massive head a little on one side, and his dark brown eyes full of dignified interest, and his great ears curving down through russet tufts, like tawny cascades in autumn, he seemed fit study for a real artist, who should quicken as well as copy him. However, he was too much of a gentleman to sneer at my weak efforts, for he saw that I did my best.

Oftentimes he would gaze steadfastly at the portrait and then at me, and hobble up, and nudge me, and whine a little, and then sigh in self-abasement at his want of speech. Whenever he did this, I knew that he wished to have something altered; but it was long before I could discover what that something was. I tried every change of line or colour that I could think of—all to no purpose. At length it struck me that as he criticised more with nose than eyes, the defect must be in the smell. Happy idea! I satisfied my Giudice at last, and did it thus. After shading around the nose and mouth, before laying on the colour, I took a clean dry brush, and passed it lightly round the hollows of his own sweet saltish nostrils, carefully avoiding the cut; then one turn of the brush, not on the palette, but on a dry square of colour, and with that I expressed the dear dog's nose so well, that he would have spoiled it in a sniffing ecstasy, if I had not pulled it away. His portrait now possessed the life which he required.

Meanwhile I received almost daily visits from Isola and her brother; the latter was, of course, very anxious about his poor dog, and could only relieve that anxiety

by long interviews with him. It happened strangely enough, yet more and more often as time went on, that Isola during these interviews felt an especial desire for Mrs. Shelfer's society, which she could only enjoy by betaking herself to the kitchen. There, with all the pets, except old Tom, who was constancy itself, and the lame blackbird who was all gratitude, her influence began to supersede mine, and even Mrs. Shelfer's; for this I cared but little, so long as Giudice kept to me.

Over that great dog, as he turned upon his side, and lifted one hind leg (the canine mode of showing submission to the will of God), over him we bent, Conrad and I, in most interesting diagnosis, until it seemed the proper thing that our hair should flow together, and our breath make one soft breeze. From this position we would rise with a conscious colour in our cheeks, and a flutter at the heart, and a certain awe of one another. Then it would be ever so long before either of us dared to seek the other's eyes. Haply when those eyes were met—unwitting yet inevitably—they would drop, or turn away, or find some new attraction in the dog or clouds.

Then some weak remark would follow, for which the hearer cared no whit, yet feigned deep interest therein.

Why labour thus to cheat ourselves—each other we cannot cheat—why feel we so confused and guilty, why long so heartily to be a hundred leagues away, yet knowing thoroughly that, if it were so, all the space between were void and heartache? The reason neither we nor other mortal knows; the cause is this, that we love one another.

I have felt that it must be so, at least on my part, ever since the day he came with Isola, and knew me not, though I knew him so well. Does he know me now as the Clara Vaughan whom he once avoided? These eyelashes are as long and dark as ever; the large eyes, shaded by them, are as deep a gray as twilight in a grove of willows. My cheeks have regained their curve, my hair was never injured; let me hie to the glass now he is gone, and see if I be like myself, and whether I have face and form likely to win Conrad's love.

No, I am not like myself. No wonder he does not know me. The gloom habitual to my face is gone.

It is the difference betwixt a cavern well and a sunny fountain. I see a laughing graceful girl, with high birth marked in every vein, and self-respect in every motion; her clear cheeks glowing with soft wonder, her red lips parted with delight, her arching neck and shoulder curve gleaming through a night of tresses, her forehead calm and thoughtful still, half-belying the bright eyes where love and pleasure sparkle. For a moment self-approval heightens the expression. At my silly self my foolish self is smiling; but the smile has warmer source than maiden's light conceit. I smile because I see that, as regards exterior, he who slights me must be hard to please; and some one, whom I think of, is not hard to please. Straight upon the thought of him—Ah well.

My father used to quote from the "Hero and Leander" a beautiful verse, which neither he nor any other could in English render duly,

Αἰδοῦς ὑγρὸν ἔρευθος ἀποστάζουσα προσώπου.—v. 173.

"Showering from her cheek the flowing carmine of her shame."

CHAPTER XII.

But when Conrad should have learned who it was that nursed his dog, would he feel the tender gratitude and delight which he now displayed so freely? Would he say, as in his fervour he now said every day, "Miss Valence, I do believe there is no one like you in the world!" Would he not rather say, "Miss Vaughan, how basely you have deceived me! Giudice, come away!" A whistle and the last sound of the foot, for which I listened now by the hour.

This thought was continually with me. It poisoned half the flavour and ruined all the digestion of my happy moments. But what could I do? How unmaidenly, how presumptuous of me to imagine that he was likely to break his heart for me! And if he did—why then he should break my own as well. I am not one of the drawing-room young ladies, who receive a modified proposal every Sunday afternoon, and think

much more about the sermon afterwards. I cannot play with the daffodils upon the brink of love, sleepily thrusting my admirers in, and lounging with half-open breast, which neither love-knots may secure, nor fluttering sighs unzone. No, here I am, such as I am, such as God has made me. No usury, no auction for my heart: once for all I give it, and my life goes with it.

So it must always be with a girl of any feeling, who has trained her own existence. But for my wild ignorance, I would dare to say—so it must be always with a girl of feeling, twist and warp her as you will. Yet I am told, by those who know the world, that it is not so with nine girls out of ten among the lady caste. If, beneath the roc of fashion, they prefer the diamond to the meat, let them have it, and starve thereon. The choice is of their own young crops. No parent bird can force the bauble down. But what have I to do with this? All I know is that neither I, nor any child of mine, will or shall be gulleted thus for life.

After every little burst of thought, every feeble sally of imagination, came (as always is the case with me)

came the slow pusillanimous reaction. All that I had any right to do was to paint, earn money, and be off for Italy.

Little as I knew about the expense of travelling, I felt sure that it would be vain to start with less than a hundred pounds. Enormous sum! How could I ever hope to win it, though I painted day and night, and lived on bread and water. To this diet, or what in London is quite synonymous, bread and milk, I had already reduced myself, in my stern resolve to lay by two pounds every week. Farewell to meat, so soon as my Devonshire "pegmate" was gone, and farewell to what I cared much more about, a glass of good London stout. I suppose there is something horribly "vulgar" in my tastes, for I will confess that the liquid called "black draught" by Mr. Dawe had much charm for me. However, I abjured it with all other luxuries, and throve no whit the worse. The kindly little woman, whose summum bonum (next to her "sticks") was plenty of good fare, took it much to heart that I should live so plainly.

"Why, Miss Valence, you are the queerest young lady as ever I set eyes on. All as ever I see, and I've

see'd a many, they picks a little bit so dainty, like a canary cracking a hemp seed when the gentlemen is by; then off they goes when there's nobody looking, and munches like so many pigs in a potato bury. Miss Violante you know. But as for you, why bless me and keep me, you feeds that great horse of a dog with all the fat of the land, and you lives on a crust yourself. Now do come down, that's a good soul; there's a clod of beef a-biling with suet dumplings, and such lovely parsnips, you can smell it all up the stairs, galloping, galloping, my good friend, and that rogue of a Charley won't come home I know, he's got along with that thief Bob Ridley; and I expects the boy every minute with a little drop of stout, and the best pewter pot for you. Now if you won't come down, Miss Valence, my dinner will all stick in my throat, and I am so hungry."

"So am I, Mrs. Shelfer, you have made me so."

In her excitement, she slipped from the edge of the chair, whereon she always balanced herself when I made her sit down. She thought it disrespectful to occupy too much room, and cuddled herself in the smallest compass possible

Let no ill be thought of Giudice. Who thinks ill of

me I care not, for I can defend myself, if it be worth while. So can Giudice with his teeth—the finest set in London—but he has no tongue, no merop tongue, I mean. It was true that Giudice had good fare, and thoroughly he enjoyed it. That dog knew a juicy bit of meat, short of staple, crisp, yet melting, quite as well as I did. True, he had a love of bones, transparent gristle, and white fibres, which I, from inferior structure, cannot quite appreciate. Yet all this was no part of his mind, much less did it affect the greatness of his soul. He kept, as all of us do who are good for anything, a certain alter ego, a higher voice, a purer sense, a vein which fashion cannot leech, or false shame tourniquet. So the good dog used to come to me, before he touched his breakfast, lunch, or dinner, and entreat me to devour all I could, there would be lots still left for him.

In my hurry to get start of time, to spin a little faster the revolving moons, I did a thing which I could ill-approve to myself, even at the moment. I wrote to Sally Huxtable to obtain Mr. Dawe's permission for me to sell my gordit. Professor Ross had offered me no less than ten guineas for it. As a gentleman he should not have made the offer, after what I had told him. But

the love of science—falsely so called by collectors—drives men to discern propriety "by the wire-drawn line of their longings."* However, I was not quite so blind upon right and wrong, as to mean to keep all the money. I offered Mr. Dawe half, if the plaything should be sold.

I knew not why, but I could not bear the idea of a bargain and sale with Conrad's father, wide apart as the two always were in my mind. I rather hoped that Beany Dawe, though sorely tempted, would refuse.

And now the time was almost come for news from Tossil's Barton. Dear Sally must have filled the twelve copybooks, at the rate of one a week. Ere I quite expected it, the letter came; but before its tidings are imparted, I must in few words describe the visit of Inspector Cutting's son. George Cutting came one evening to see his good Aunt Patty, for so he called Mrs. Shelfer, who was in truth his cousin. Though I had been so assured that my enemy could not escape I was not equally convinced, and at times a deep anxiety and despair possessed me.

Therefore I went to the kitchen to see the Inspector's

* "Exiguo fine libidinum."

son, and requested Mrs. Shelfer to allow me five minutes of conversation with him. He stood all the while, and seemed rather shy and confused. He had not heard from his father, since the ship sailed; but he had seen in the papers that she had been spoken somewhere. "The party as I knew of" was still safe in London—my blood ran like lava at the thought—or I should have heard of it. He, George Cutting, had his eye upon him, and so had two of the detective force; but what were they in comparison with his father? This he asked, despite his shyness, with so large a contempt, that I began to think the Cutting family admired the Cuttings only.

Upon me, who am no Cutting, he left the simple impression that the qualities, so lauded by his father, lay as yet beneath a bushel. However, his Aunt Patty declared that he could eat three times as much as Charley. Not unlikely, if he only drank one-third of Charley's allowance.

"Mrs. Shelfer, who knew that I was laying by a fixed sum every week, began to look upon me as a fine young miser. Of course she quite fell in with what she supposed to be my ideas, for she never contradicted any one, unless it was a cabman.

"Oh, I do love money, my good friend; gold, gold, it is so bootiful. Did you ever hear tell of the marrow bone I had? Oh dear!"

"What marrow bone, Mrs. Shelfer?"

"Why a big beef marrow bone, that long, full of sovereigns and guineas after dear Miss Minto. I stopped it with a bung and a piece of bladder, and for better than a twelvemonth, while they was executing her will, I slept with that beneath my pillow for fear the priest should get it. Lord, how they did fight over the poor old lady's rags and bones, that leathery priest and three yellow kites of cousins, they said they was, as come from Portugal. At last they got a ministration * with the testament and text, and they robbed me shameful, shameful, my good friend. Never catch me going to mass again, or you may tell me of it."

"And what became of the marrow bone, Mrs. Shelfer?"

At this inquiry, she winked both eyes rapidly, and screwed up her little mouth.

"Oh what a thief that Father Banger was, to be sure! You see, Miss, I had strict orders to shut him out, when

* ? Letters of Administration cum testamento annexo.

Miss Minto was near her end, because he had kicked her dear cat Filippina from the top of the stairs to the bottom, after he had gived her unction. What a pretty sight it was to see them seven dear cats, all sitting round the fire, each one on his proper stool with his name done on it in different coloured worsted. I had so much a year left me on the Bank of England, honourable to the day, for each one of those cats, and change of diet every week, and now there's only one of them left, and that is my dear old Tom."

"But, Mrs. Shelfer, about the marrow bone—"

"Well, my good friend, I was going to tell you. The way that Father Banger got into the house again to steal the poor old lady's money, for building a school or some such villany. He knowed how fond the poor soul was of cats, so he borrowed a cat somewhere, and he got two boys to let it down the area with a whipcord round its stomach, and to jerk, jerk, jerk away at it, and the poor thing did squeal sure enough. 'Run, Patty,' says my poor mistress, and she could hardly speak—'Oh, Patty, there's some cruel Englishman torturing a cat again.' So out I runs into the area, and in pops Father Banger, who had his back to the wall,

with a great sheet of paper; and he begins to make a list of all the things in the house. I took the cat to dear Miss Minto, and how pleased she was! 'Please God,' says she, 'to let me live a few days more till I make a Catholic of this poor heretic'—she always converted her cats the first thing—'and then it shall have a stool and a good annuity.' But next day the poor thing went."

Little Mrs. Shelfer had so great a fear of death, that like some ancient nations she shunned all mention of his name, by euphemistic periphrase. She had never known real illness, and even a stitch or a spasm would frighten her for days. When I spoke calmly, as I sometimes did, of our great inevitable friend, whom we so labour to estrange, up would jump Mrs. Shelfer with a shudder and a little scream.

"Oh don't, my good soul, oh don't! How can you? Let us live, Miss Valence, let us live while we can, and not think of such dreadful things. You make my blood run cold."

"But, Mrs. Shelfer, surely you know that we all must die."

"Of course, my good friend, of course. But then you

needn't remind one of it. I met Doctor Franks to-day, and he said, 'Why, Mrs. Shelfer, I do declare, you look younger than ever,' and a very clever man he is, yes, yes; and not a gray hair in my head, and my father lived to eighty-eight."

"And how old are you, Mrs. Shelfer, now?"

"Oh I am sure I don't know, Miss Valence, I don't keep no account. Let us talk of something else. Did you hear what Tom did to your Judy to-day?"

Ah, poor little thing! But I am not going to moralise. Shall I ever know the history of that marrow bone?*

* I have now ascertained that a roving dog popped in and away with the marrow bone, sovereigns, guineas, and all.—C. V. 1864.

CHAPTER XIII.

Tossil's Barton, estimating the British Post by the standard of Joe Queen's boy, placed but little confidence in that institution. Moreover, Tossil's Barton held that a "papper scrawl," as it termed a letter, was certain to be lost for want of size, unless it were secured in something large, "something as a man can zee and hold on to," as the farmer himself expressed it.

Therefore I was not surprised at receiving, instead of a letter by post, a packet delivered by the parcels van. This packet was bound round like the handle of a whip, and stuck at either end with a mass of cobbler's wax, bearing the vivid impress of a mighty thumb. Within the wrappings first appeared an ominous crumpled scroll. Ye stars, where angels so buffooned by eminent painters dwell! Once more I behold Eli on the turnpike gate, the Great Western steamer, Job with a potsherd of willow-pattern plate, the Prodigal Son, and worse

than all, that hideous Death and the Lady. Recklessly I tumble out all the rest of the packet. Three great belts with silver clasps, three apostle spoons, two old silver salt-cellars marked W. H. J. H., a child's christening cup, a horn tobacco-stopper with a silver tip, an agate from the beach, a tortoise-shell knife with a silver blade, half a dozen coins and a bronze fibula found upon the farm, an infant's coral, a neck-pin garnished with a Bristol diamond, a number of mother-of-pearl buttons and blue beads, and a mass of mock jewelry bought by the farmer from the Cheapjacks at Barum fair with the produce of his wrestling triumphs. Separate from the rest, and packed most carefully, were all but two of the trinkets I had sent as Christmas gifts for the family.

Touched to the heart by all this loving kindness, I felt so ashamed of my paltry petulance at Eli, Jonah, and the rest, that I would not indulge in a peep at Sally's letter, which came last of all, until I had starved myself for a day. That literary effort showed so much improvement, both in writing and in spelling, that any critic would have endorsed Mr. Huxtable's conclusion that the gift must be in the family. A few words still

there were of rather doubtful texture, but who can bind or bound the caprice and luxury of the English language? Moreover, Sally's stops were left once more to the discretion of the reader. But if Lord Byron could not grasp the mysteries of punctuation, how could Sally Huxtable? Yet that eager little maid would have learned in half an hour the art which might have mellowed the self-tormentor's howling. Sally's was a healthy, sweet, and wholesome nature.

Tossil's Barton Farm, Trentisoe.
The tenth day of March A.D. 1851.

"DEAR MISS CLARA DEAR,—If you please, father and mother and me and our little Jack hope this letter will find you in good health as it leaves all of us at this present, or when it will be finished, thank God for the same, and hoping no offence. The baby as was born on the 20th day of October last is a very fine and lusty wench at this time of writing, and have got two teeth, and her hair coming again, and answers to the name of Clara, as you know Miss you was so kind to give her leave and liberty, and father call Clara to her now, and so do I and Jack, but mother will call her Babby still, and so the chillers does.

Father often say, "Babby! Why there be a hundred babbies in the world, and a thousand either, for ought I knows again it, but I reckon there isn't half a dozen Claras." But mother say she can't help it: she always did call them babbies till they was put into short-clothes, and longer too, if so be there wasn't another, and she feels a call on her to do it, and no offence Miss Clara for that same. If you please Miss, when the parson say "Name this child," and Aunt Muxworthy, from over to Rowley Mires, say, quite peart, "Clara, sir"—father had been learning her, you see Miss, all the morning—parson look, so mother say, the same as a skinned sheep all skivered out to dry; and Tim Badcock go haw haw, till father was forced to slip behind the godmothers and fetch him a little clout on the side of his head. Then parson say at last, "Clara maam! There be no child of that name to this side of Coom, and it seem to me to go again the rub rick." Father say the parson must be a high farmer, for none of us ever hear tell of that rick in this country. "Now take my advice and think better of it Mrs. Muxworthy," the parson say again. So she looks to father, for you see Miss she were not edified about it being right, because

she could not find it in the Bible nowhere. And she say, "Think better of it farmer now; if you wants a handsome name, there's Tryphena and Tryphosa, and has been in the family afore." "Mother," says my father, and he looked the way he do when he don't intend to talk about a thing, "Mother, go home with the child, and I'll take her to Parracombe Church next Sunday; and tell Suke not to put the goose down."

You see, Miss, we was going to have a supper after church, and the best goose on the farm, and the parson was coming too. "Sober now," say the parson, "if so be now, farmer John, you have put your mind upon naming this here infant Clara, why I will christen her so, only an under Protestant, and with difference to the chapter." Father only say "Amen, so be it;" and then parson do it, and do it uncommon well too, father say, and she only laugh when they give her the splash. Father told us afterwards as he believed parson was afeared he couldn't spell Clara fitty; but mother say he be wrong there, and all along of his pride, for parson be a college chap and so he can spell anything amost, in one way or another.

Miss Clara, all them beautiful things as you sent for

us to Christmas time, with the forepart of all our names upon them, except Sally, was sunk in the bottom of the brook in the hole below the stickle by the hollow ash, where the big trout hath his hover, all along of Joe the Queen's boy ; and we never knew ought about it till your after letter come. Then our little Jack, who be quite a big boy now, and button his own corduroys, go down to the brook at once, and pull off all his things, and there he rake and feel among the stones for the biggest part of a day, though the ice was on the edge but the water were quite clear ; and Tabby Badcock want to pull off her things and go in too, but Jack would not let her, and be ashamed of herself, and I sat on the bank and Tabby, and Jack pull out nine beautiful things, as were meant for father, and mother, and him, and Billy, and little Honor, and Bobby, and Peggy, and the two weanies, but he couldn't find nothing as were meant for me Sally, unless Tabby stole it, and she be quite equal to it I am afeared : and we all returns you many many kind thanks and love, especially the ones as had it, and me. Our Jack say, No her wouldn't do it, he'll go bail for that, no fie ! But I shake my head ; though perhaps she never had the chance, if so be

there wasn't none marked Sally, and thank you every bit the same, Miss, so long as there wasn't none for Tabby."

Poor little Sally! She must have cried bitterly to think of her being forgotten. But the best of all, next to the farmer's, was for her, and there was one for Tabby too.

"Miss Clara dear, the things was not hurt at all by being under water for a week, and father say they must be made of the very same gold as Queen Victoria's crown and sceptre is, as never can rust with the briny waves; and Beany Dawe feel cock sure as it was the fairy of the brook stole them from Joe's breeches pocket, and keep mine still he say because it be the prettiest. But there, he never know much, any more than Tabby does.

If you please Miss, asking your pardon, when Aunt Muxworthy were here, to the christening time, she said she never see such writing in her life as mine, and it wasn't my best copy neither, and she said it was a sin to make a scholar of a honest wench like that, and I should want to be the parson next, and read the forty-two generations and play the fort piano; and I

didn't know, Miss, whether to laugh or cry, so I began to eat an apple; but father say quite slowly, "Sister Muxworthy, you was never gifted with no eddication no more nor I Jan Uxtable, and how be us to know if it be good or bad? Once I had a horse, say father, as afore ever he went into the field, turned up his nose at the grass like, and with turning up so much he died at last of the glanders. But I never see that there horse persuade the others to starve." Aunt Muxworthy toss her head, and we thought she wouldn't eat no goose, but the smell of the stuffing and the weather was too many for her; and she eat a wing, and a leg, and one side of the breast, and it do her good. And afore she had had much brandy, "John," she say, "you was right and I was wrong. Let the little wench crack on, and some day they'll hear of her to tother side of Hexmoor." So father laugh and kiss her, and the chillers was put to bed, and we drink your health Miss, and Clara's nine times nine, and father say he'll learn himself some day, when he give up wrestling, only he fear it would make his hand shake terrible, and then some laugh and some of us cry, and they has more hot water, and Beany Dawe set to, and make so many poems he turn the

stairs somehow inside out, and Suke and Tim was forced to heave him into the tallat, and keep him from going abroad by a rope of onions round him and two truss of hay on the top. Next day, he make no poems at all till he drink more than a gallon of cider.

Oh Miss Clara dear, what ever is the matter with you? Father be in such a taking I never see. To-day your letter come about selling that knob-thing of Beany Dawe's, and we knows it must be all along of the crown jewels you bought for us, as we meant to keep in the family to the end of all our time. Mother double up, and cry into the churn, and spoil all the butter; and father were that upset he stamp out of the house a trying hard to whistle, and he couldn't see no one there to let it off on but Timothy Badcock, and he were a little saucy, so he toss Tim up on the linhay roof and his legs come through the thatch, and father was forced to ease him out with the pitchfork. Tim was stiff a bit in the evening, and serve him right say mother, for laughing so at the Cornishers; but father give him some neatsfoot oil and cider, and we knew us couldn't hurt him because he be double-iointed.

And if you please Miss Clara dear, we would not

stoop to ask Beany Dawe and he nothing but a sawing poet; so father go to the old oak chest with the white-wash on it, and pull it open without the key, and take out some old rubbish he saith, and order mother to pack it without a word, and mother want to put in a pair of linen sheets and the best table-cloth, but father say quite crusty like, "Do e take our Miss Clara for a common packman?" And when I say, "Please father what shall I say about it all?" he answer me quite low, "How ever can I tell child? Ask your mother there. Only give my best respects and most humble duty, and tell Miss Clara I wishes I could find a man to throw me all four pins, for being such a drunken hosebird not to have more to send her. But I know her won't take money from the likes of us. Stop," father say, "ask her to please to lift our horn up as the horn of an unicorn. I knows where to go for lots of money and all to be had for asking. I'll go to Bodmin town next week," say father, "and show them Cornishers a trick of Abraham Cann. Since honest Abraham took the sprain, he left it all to me, though God knows, and thank him for the same, I never want it yet. I should like to see the Cornisher as could stand my grip." And then father pull both his

hands out of his pockets. Mother say he wear them out he do spraddle both his thumbs so.

It seems a curious thing, Miss Clara dear, father never get vexed or weist like, but what he want to wrestle, and other times he never think of it, unless it be to fair or revel time.

When I asked mother and said as father tell me to, the tears was in her eyes, and she try to look angry with me, and then she broke out crying as loud as Suke when the cow Molly kick her. So between the both of them, Miss, I can't know what to say, so please to make it yourself Miss, for I am sure I can't find any thing only the best love of our hearts and a side of bacon us would like to send, and the butter from my own little cow, all sweet hay and no turmots ; I be to sit in Coom market, all by myself, on Saturday, and mother not come nigh me, and I know you'll let me send you the money, and I expects elevenpence a pound, because you never was proud with your loving scholar ever to command and obey,

SALLY HUXTABLE.

All this here underneath and over the leaf is going to be written after the rest of this here paper.

If you please Miss Clara dear, there come now just a very fine spoken gentleman with a long coat the colour of udder, and blue flaps, and blue at the hands, and ever so many great silver buttons with a print like pats of best butter, and gold ribbon round his hat. We seemed at first he be an officer of dragoons, till we see'd the flour in his hair, and then us knowed he was the Queen's miller. Father was a great mind to show him a forehip and send his buttons to you Miss, because he see they be worth ever so much more than these little things all put together, only mother stop him.

Then the gentleman say he know Mr. Henwood well, and respect him much, and he be sent here by expression to discover where you be Miss Clara, and it be most particular, and if we wished you well, us would tell him to once. Father and mother and me puts him in the parlour and gives him a jug of the very best cider, and then we goes and lays our heads together about him in the cheese-room, and mother and me was for telling him, only father say no. You never give us leave, and us wants to do what is right and upright, unless you order us contrary, and us has no right to tell without ask you, and you so full of enemies.

So father say, very grand for him: "Honoured sir, us hopes the honour of a papper scrawl from Miss Clara in ten days time, or may be a fortnight, according to the weather please God, and us be satisfied too. My eldest daughter here be writing to Miss Clara for a week or more, and if so be she have got room left on the papper scrawl she ask Miss Clara's leave, and us shall have time enough to hear what her say in a fortnight, or mebbe three weeks."

"Oh then, she be gone to Hitaly at the least." The gentleman say. Father never hear tell of Hitaly whether it be in London town or no, but he look to mother and me to hold our noise. The gentleman say something sound very much like "Dang," and father hoped he would be saucy, because then he send his buttons in spite of mother and me; but when he look at father he think better of it, and go off very civil in the carriage he come by, only say he would find out in spite of us.

And please Miss Clara dear, mother say she be ashamed to send you a parcel all rubbage, except the pictures, but she do hope they wont cheat you about them there, for they be the finest ever come to these

parts, and warranted real London made. All the farmers hereaway want to buy them of us. And father say, "Dang the pictures, tell Miss Clara to come to us, and her shan't want Beany Dawe's things, nor the Queen's miller either." Oh do come, Miss Clara dear, the banks be yellow with primroses, and white and blue with violets, and I know three blackbirds nests already and an ousel's down by the river. Oh do come. I have got such a lot to tell you, things as I can't make head or tail of when I try to spell them, and you shall milk my own cow Sally, and have all my black hen's eggs, and the ducks too if they hatch,—and sling all the small potatoes from the plough field to the hazel hedge. Your best scholar as ever was and loving pupil

SALLY HUXTABLE."

CHAPTER XIV.

From Sally's eager description of the coat and buttons, I concluded easily that a servant from Vaughan St. Mary had been sent in quest of me. My father hated showy liveries and loathed hair-powder, but Mr. Edgar Vaughan returned to the family usages, or rather allowed them to re-establish themselves; for on such questions he was wholly indifferent. Now what could be his motive for sending so expressly to discover me? I knew not, neither cared very greatly, but wrote at once to Tossil's Barton, first to return their loving contribution, which consisted mainly of ancestral relics prized for generations, secondly, to set free the secret of my address.

Into my own self I returned once more. Somehow I seem to expand whenever I come in contact with the yeoman's family, and their lowly greatness. I am like a worm when it rains, after the drought of summer.

Surely the God, who leaves us to stifle ourselves with the dust of fashion and convention, has His own gracious times to breathe upon and scatter it. At intervals we may see through the reek of our own exuding, and inhale a more bracing air than sleeps in mausoleums. But instead of being exalted and fed by the open breeze, we shudder at the draught and replace our respirators.

I returned into myself, and found little comfort there. I do not live inside myself, as most people live in theirs. True, I am apt to resent any slight to it offered from the outside. True, I seek its keep and comfort in a mechanical sort of way. But as for crusting in its bottle, ripening in its husk, rusting in its watch-case, I have been too long the toy of wind and weather not to be turned inside out. Never can I moulder into the fungoid nucleus the British taste admires. And yet there is about me, if I must not say within me, a stanch cleaving, a cohesion, a concrete will, which is of genuine Anglo-Saxon fibre. So I thrust aside all dreams of Tossil's Barton and Vaughan Park, and certain wilder sweeter dreams which have begun to flutter and thrill through me, and in earnest I return to my task of money-making.

Giudice still is faithful, and comforts much my solitude. He has never asked his master's leave or mine, he has never received any formal invitation, yet here he looks all at home, sleek and unblushing, though long since quite convalescent and equal to livery stable diet. Once indeed, as we passed the entrance, he pretended to me that his conscience pricked him. To ease it, he sniffed about, and halted just for a moment, then turned his nose up, recocked his tail, and trotted jauntily on. Since then he has always avoided that left side of the street. He is affable still to Isola, but clearly regards her as no more than a pleasant acquaintance. Whenever she enters the room, he walks from his corner with a stretch and a yawn, sniffs all round her dress, to learn where she has been, and what dogs she has spoken to; then, in the absence of any striking discovery, he looks into her face with a grave complacence, and brings me his conclusion. Tom, and the birds, the squirrel, and the little marmoset (Mrs. Shelfer's newest and dearest pet), he gazes upon from a lofty standing as so many specimens of natural history, interesting so far, but otherwise contemptible. He is now allowed free run of the house,

understands all the locks, and presents himself in every room at the proper meal-time. Even the little dress-maker is then honoured with his attentions. Everybody loves him, he is so gentle and clever and true. Back he comes to me, with his mouth rather greasy I must admit, gives me one kiss (as a form, I am afraid), and exclaiming, "Dear me! What a life this is!" sits down on his rug to think.

No one can tempt him further than the corner of our street, except his master or myself. Miss Flounce, with my permission, granted not without jealousy, once aspired to the escort of Giudice. Although she carried a bag of his favourite biscuits (made perhaps of bone-dust), and kept one of them in her hand, Judy flattered her only to the corner; then he turned abruptly, and trotted firmly (rudely she called it) home, with his eyes upon my balcony. I gave him more of his biscuits than he would have got from her.

All this was very delightful. But there were two sad drawbacks. In the first place, Giudice expected me to forego every other line of art, and devote all my time to portraiture of himself. This was unreasonable, and I could not do it. Apart from other considerations,

Mr. Oxgall, after buying three studies of him, declined to take any more until those three should be sold. To Giudice himself I had based my refusal upon more delicate grounds. I had quoted to him,

> "Although, lest I profane your hallowed part,
> Queen Nature chills the blood around my heart;
> Sweet dog, permit me to indulge my dream
> Of country valleys, and the mazy stream."

But he took no heed, and never would permit me so to do, without the keenest jealousy.

The other drawback was still more serious. Either by maintaining the dog, I placed his owner under an obligation; or by engrossing the dog's society, I laid myself under obligation to his owner. Either view of the case was unpleasant; the latter, which I adopted, soon became intolerable. So I spoke about it to Isola, for I could not well explain myself to her brother, who ought indeed to have perceived my dilemma.

"Oh Donna," she cried, "what nonsense you do talk! Obliged to us indeed! I am sure we are all greatly obliged to you; and many a stir it saves us at home, for the dog detests papa so; and when Conrad comes to see us, he can't bear to have Judy shut out like a thief, and he the most honourable dog that ever wagged a tail."

"To be sure he is. You know you are, don't you, oh combination of Bayard and Aristides?"

That union of justice and chivalry wagged his tail to me, and nodded gravely to Isola.

"But I have said all along that Conny should pay for his board, and he feels it too: but we could not tell how to propose it to you, dear Donna, you are so very outrageous."

"I should hope so indeed."

"And then I am sure it would break poor Judy's heart to go. Wouldn't it now, Judy?"

Giudice did not answer her, but came and laid his great head on my lap, and looked up at me as only a dog can look. In that wistful look he said as plainly as possible—

"You know I am only a dog. But you, Clara, happen to be a human being; and so you know all we dogs know, and ever so much besides. Only you can't smell. You can talk, as fast as you like, both to each other and to us, but we can talk to none except our fellow dogs. Now don't take a mean advantage of me. I know that I was made only to be your servant, and I love you with all my heart, that I do. I can't tell at all where I shall

go when I die, or if I shall go anywhere; and I am sure I shall die, if you cast me away like this."

So I kissed his dotty whiskers, and promised not to desert him, though I should go all the way to the stables twice a day to see him.

"And another thing, Clara dear," resumed his master's sister, "I consider him now more my dog than Conny's. You know he was given between us"—this was the first time I heard of it—"and I only lent Conrad my half as long as he liked to pay for him."

Lovely Isola, like most other lovely girls, was keen about money-matters. Not that she was ungenerous. That impulsive little mortal would give away all her substance, the moment her heart was touched, and it was not hard to touch, despite all the quick suspicions which her London life and native shrewdness had now begun to produce. But as regards small dealings, she was thoroughly qualified to keep a meat-pie shop, or go upon board wages, or even to take furnished lodgings: by which climax I mean no disrespect to Mrs. Shelfer, who (considering her temptations) is the very pink of honesty, especially since Giudice came.

As to these small matters, and as to many large ones,

I was dear Isola's cardinal opposite. She would make, for most men, a far better wife than I should ; although she will never love with a tenth part of the intensity. She can't even hate like me. When I hate, I loathe and abhor. I never hate any one lightly, and hardly ever am reconciled, or suppress it. Isola talks about hating, but has never learned what it means. Spite she can carry, and nurse like a doll, and count it a minor virtue, albeit she cannot be sulky ; hate is too heavy a burden, Scorn, which is with women the hate of things beneath them, Isola hardly knows. Perhaps she will learn it when her knowledge of the world narrows and condenses, as with most women it does.

Another great difference there is between Isola and me. Although she never would think of deceiving any one seriously, and would on no account tell a downright malicious lie, yet she is not so particular about telling little fibs, or at any rate colouring matters so highly that others are misled. This she can justify to herself in a charming warm-hearted way. And yet she rarely makes mischief. Her departures are half unconscious, and always arise from good will.

"And so now, Clara dear," concluded the senior

sophist, "as Conrad has owned all the dog so long, it is my turn to own every bit of him for an equal period, and I must pay you half a crown a week for his keep, and half a guinea for doctoring him so well."

I was much inclined to take her at her word, it would have been such a surprise. But what a disgrace to Giudice and to me!

"Oh Donna," she continued, "you have no idea how fond dear Conny is of you. I am getting so jealous. He thinks much more of you than he does of me."

I bent over my drawing with more carmine on my cheeks than was on the palette. What folly to be sure! And Isola *would* come round in front.

"Why don't you answer me, Clara? Did you ever know such a shame? Well, I do believe you like being admired every bit as much as I do, in spite of all your sublimity. Why there comes Conny himself;" and to my great relief she stepped into the balcony. "I thought so. I knew the ring of his heel. He will wear such clumsy boots, though his foot is as pretty as mine. I always know his step, and so does Judy."

Alas! and so do I. How weak and paltry of me, with a life like mine before me!

"I will go and open the door," cries his sister; "how rude he is to come when you are so busy, Clara."

Away she runs, then ushers him grandly in, and away again to nurse the marmoset. I know that I look slightly discomposed. There is a glow upon me as if I had stepped into sunlight. Conrad fails to notice it, or conceals the perception. He stands before my easel. How I long for his approbation! That of course is only from his knowledge of art and his native taste. Yet I fear to look at his face, but wait for him to speak. With a stretch like a windlass, and a cavernous yawn, up comes Giudice, and pokes himself right in front of my work. Could I have foreseen that effrontery and execrable taste, less bread and milk would he have had for breakfast. Conrad perceives my vexation, and despite his good breeding is too natural not to smile. The smile is infectious, and I obtain no more than a look of commendation. But that is enough for me. I resolve to keep the drawing: Mr. Oxgall may bid what he likes.

As our eyes meet, Conrad's and mine, I see that he is not in his usual spirits. Something has happened to vex him. Oh that I dared to ask what it is. I also am heavy at heart, and ill at ease with myself. Is it any

wonder? My nature is true and straight-forward as well as proud and passionate. But here have I been, for weeks and weeks, stooping below its level. I have even been deceitful. Perhaps there was no dishonour in my change of name, with such an object in view. Perhaps there was good excuse for maintaining disguise with Conrad, when first we met in London. But was it right and honourable to persist in my alias, when I could not help suspecting his growing attachment to me? Peradventure my conscience alone would not account for all the misery I felt about this. Had I no selfish misgivings as well? Now as I stood before him, my breast began to flutter with fear, not so acute, but deeper than my alarm in the dark, when I crouched from the conspirators.

"Miss Valence," at last he began, "I am grieved in my heart by hearing that you were not treated at all politely last night." He was greatly moved, and began to lose his command of colloquial English. I had spent an evening at the Professor's house in Lucas Street, the second time only of my being there. Now I came to recollect it, Dr. Ross had certainly been a little overbearing, but I did not feel hurt thereby,

because I cared not for him, and knew it to be his manner. Isola had told her brother, but without meaning any harm. Her father no doubt had been vexed, because I could not sell him my gordit.

"Oh, Mr. Ross," I replied, "I think nothing at all of that. A learned man like your father cannot be expected to bear with every ignorant girl's curiosity."

"To a lady's love of knowledge every gentleman should administer and be gratified. All men of lofty science enjoy to meet with a gentle mind inquiring."

It was not the first time Master Conrad had disparaged, by implication, his father's great acquirements. To me it seemed scarcely graceful, and very far from dutiful, but many of my sentiments are dreadfully old-fashioned. An awkward pause ensued; how could I answer without condemning one or the other? Though I could not quite acquit Conrad, my heart was entirely with him, for I had long been aware that he was not happy at home. There he stood, with an angry countenance, having declined the chair I had offered him. Suddenly he took both my hands and looked me full in the face, though his eyes were glistening. I gazed full at him, with vague apprehensions rising. How or

why, I know not, but at that very moment my hair, which is always a trouble to me, fell in a mass down my cheeks and neck. He started back, but still held my hands.

"I am made certain that I have seen you long ago. I will think, I will think."

I saw at once how it was, the fear on my face reminded him. I meant to tell him some day, but I never meant him to find out. Scorning myself for a hypocrite, I looked stedfastly at him and smiled.

"You will forgive me, Miss Valence, you know that I would not use a freedom."

He saw in my eyes that I knew it, and dropped my hands, and went on.

"You will think me the weakest in mind and most wicked, but I am most unhappy."

I started in turn, and how I longed to console him! What use is pride if it cannot even command one's eyes?

"It is to me a disgrace to come to you with my troubles. But I do it from no unmanly temper. I do it alone for the sake of my precious sister Isola. I have no longer any one whom I dare to love but her,

and now I am compelled to abandon her at the last."

"Do you mean to be long away?" This I managed to ask pretty well, though it was sore work.

"I shall not be away from London, but I shall be departed from Isola. The house where she lives I am no more to visit. A long time I have gone there only a little, and alone to see her. She is ordered now to come no more to me. This day I spoke very violently. But I will not detain you with that. I will confess I did wrong; but I was richly provoked. My object in burdening you is double:—First to implore you, if I may without using liberty, to endure well with the Professor, lest she should be interdicted from coming to visit you, and then she would have no one remaining to love her. Second to ask, a thing that I hesitate because I cannot narrate to you all things, whether you would indulge me, if there is no wrong, to come now and then to see my own and my only sister."

"Of course you do not mean without her father's knowledge."

"I would never insult you, Miss Valence, by asking a thing like that. I desire nothing of what you call

clandestine. You are so free and open, you would never have to do with any sort of concealment. Neither am I in the habit to do anything like that. It has only been commanded that I may not go there, or invite her to come to my house. The Professor has great power in the present, but he does not pretend to interdict me from my sister."

His eyes flashed, as he spoke, with an expression quite unfilial. Remembering how differently I had loved my own dear father, I felt disappointed and grieved, but had no right to show it.

"Only one more thing I will entreat of you, Miss Valence; poor Isola has never learned what means any grief. If she is vexed by this, I pray you to sustain and comfort her; for I shall never make a wrong advantage of your most kind permission, so as to see her very often."

He raised my hand to his lips in gratitude for what he called a kindness beyond all value to him, and his voice was trembling as he turned away. But I had done no kindness, I had given no permission; for I was not calm enough to distinguish right from wrong. Strange indeed it seemed to me that I, for the most

part so decided, could not now determine, but was all perplexity. My great iceberg self-reliance, built in bleak and lonesome years, was now adrift and melting in the bright sun of friendship and the warm sea-depths of love.

CHAPTER XV.

Isola happened that day to leave me before the usual time, being afraid that her father, who was not in his sweetest mood, would be angry with her. She was grieved of course at the new dissension, and thought me (her ideas were of loose texture) somewhat to blame somehow. Nevertheless she soon forgave me the crime I had not committed.

That day I could paint no more, but sat me down to meditate. Suddenly a loud ring and a louder knock echoed through the house. Quickly Mrs. Shelfer's little feet came pattering up the stairs, and her grey eyes actually seemed to come in first at the door. On the crown of her head her black cap hung, like the top of a chaise doubled back.

"Oh my good friend, look here! I was never so frightened in all my life."

She held as far from her as she could reach a closed

envelope, addressed "Miss Clara Vaughan." I tore it open and read—"Mr. Vaughan is dying, come instantly Sent by Mrs. Fletcher."

"Telegraph, my good soul," cried Mrs. Shelfer, Electric Telegraph Company, all screams the wires red hot, and you must sign the message he says. And is there any answer? And they give him eighteen pence. Oh dear, I shall never get over it. Never had such a turn since my brother John went, and they tucked him up so bootiful, and I said to the clerk at Barbican—"

"Out of my way if you please. Let me sign the form, nd leave me alone a minute. There is no answer."

Should I go or not? Bitterly as I disliked him, could I let him die among hirelings and strangers—I, his brother's daughter? A year ago I would have done so and thought it the judgment of God. Now I remembered my dear mother's death, and doubted about going only because I knew not how he would take it. My hesitation was very brief. A cab was ordered, Giudice entrusted to Mrs. Shelfer's care, a short note left for Isola, a few things put together anyhow, and I was ready to start.

Even in this hurry a selfish terror smote me, and I cautioned Mrs. Shelfer strictly to conceal both name and destination. She had only to say that some relative was suddenly taken ill, somewhere down in the country; the country being to her mind a desert marked with milestones, my description did not seem unreasonably vague.

As I stood in the passage waiting for the cab, the poor dog, who had been quite flurried, and scented indefinite evil, commenced, prolonged, and would not conclude a howl of passing sadness.

"Oh, my good friend," cried Mrs. Shelfer, "let me stop the cab. All waste of money to go. The good gentleman, whoever he is, is as dead as a crabshell now. There was a terrier with a split ear, next door but one, when my poor brother John was ill; his name was Jack, I think, no, Tom; bless me, no, what am I thinking of, Bob—Charley knows, I dare say—"

"Well, send me his name by telegraph. Here's the cab, Mrs. Shelfer."

Heavy thumps of weary wambling feet, grating of wheels, a needless "whoa," and we open the door.

Giudice bolts first into the cab, and sitting upright

with his tongue out and a sprightly pant, occupies the whole. It takes the united strength, address, and authority of cabman, landlady, and myself to get him out again. Then he coils his tail to his stomach, droops his ears and eyes, and receiving two hot tears and a kiss is sidled and deluded into the narrow passage. The last thing I hear is a howl that winds far round the corner and beyond the square.

In an hour and a half from the delivery of the message, I was in a second-class carriage, and we shrieked away from Paddington. The hurry and rush overcame me for a while. Soon the April evening was spread with shadowy gray, and we were rushing past the wooded waves of Pangbourne, and casting silver rings of steam on the many-fingered spruce, before I could collect and feel my thoughts again. As we glided through plantations and between the winding hills, with the partridge beginning his twilight call, the pheasants come out of the coppice to feed, and the late rook plying his dusky wings, at length the dust and city turmoil lagged round the corner miles away, and we sparkled in the dewy freshness of the silent moon. Though all alone in the carriage, I vainly tried for

prudence' sake to creep into the cloak of sleep. Every vein and every pore was full of gushing thrilling electric life. The country, the country! the heavenly country's glory! how had I breathed and groped in the city grave so long? For every thought that dribbled there and guttered in my brain, a hundred thousand now flow through me, not of brain, but soul. Thoughts I cannot call them, for there is no volition, neither have they sequence, impress, or seen image: only a broad stream gliding, whence and whither I know not. How can I describe to others what I cannot tell myself?

"Glost'! Glost'! change here for Chelt'm!" &c. broke my dreaming suddenly. It was eleven at night. I had come unwrapped; the heavenly country and nature's tide forgot to keep me warm. Out I came upon the platform, and dreamily began to seek my carpet-bag, for I had no heavy luggage. The moon was struggling with the gas-lights, as nature in me fought with modern life.

"Fly, Miss, fly?" the lonely porter asked.

"Yes, please," said I.

"Where for, Miss?"

"Vaughan St. Mary."—At this part of my life, I dropped the grand "Vaughan Park;" it seemed too fine for me, and I was well content to be of Conrad's class in the world.

"Oh, there's a carriage waiting at every train, if you please, Miss."

And with tenfold politeness the porter showed me across the square to one of the family hearses, which my father and I so detested. It so happened that the driver and footman were taking some light refreshment at the bar of a neighbouring edifice, while the horses champed their bits and whinnied. The men came out against their will, and stared at me in the broad moonshine. I was very simply, plainly, and cheaply dressed, in deep mourning still for my darling mother; but no servant of even slight experience could take me, I think, for anything but a lady; little as it matters. The men were half-drunk, very surly at being disturbed, and inclined to form a low estimate of my dress and carpet-bag.

"You mean to say you be Miss Vaughan, young 'ooman?" stuttered the reeling coachman, with his hands beneath his flaps and a short pipe in his mouth,

"Now I tell you plainly, there's no mistake about me mind, I can't noway credit it. It don't seem likely, do it, Bob?"

"Likely, Jacob? Yes, like enough to a fool; but nohow creditable to the like of us. Think I don't know now? Perhaps the young 'ooman will answer a few questions, Jacob."

"Ah, let you alone; let you alone, Bob! Specially for young women!"

"Porter, a cab at once, if you please; or a fly I think you call it here." Oh my London impudence!

"To be sure, Miss; the best in Gloucester directly. And, Miss"—confidentially, "if I was in your shoes, I'd walk them chaps about their business to-morrow. How they have been carrying on here, to be sure, ever since the six o'clock train come in. Why, in the time of the old Squire Vaughan—"

"Thank you, the fly, if you please."

In two minutes I was off for my father's home with mighty rattle of glass, and many jerking noises. About three miles from Gloucester we were passed by Jacob and Robert, who were sitting side by side and driving furiously. Convinced at last by the porter

of my genuine Vaughanship, they had set off full speed to secure first audience.

At length we passed the lodge, where the gates creaked as of yore, and dear old Whitehead trembled at my voice, and so along the great avenue where I had studied the manners and ways of every tree, and where Tulip (Nestor among deer) came to stare at us with his grey face silver in the moonlight. Poor old friend, he knew me as well as Giudice did, but I could not stop to talk to him. Soon as the bell was rung the broad bolt of the great lock, which I was once so proud to draw, flew back with suspicious promptitude.

Albeit he had changed the cloth too ochrously described by Sally, for a suit of gentle gray, and had drawn out his face to a most unjovial length, and assumed an attitude of very profound respect, there he was, quite unmistakeable to observant eyes, the Bacchanalian Bob.

"And please, Miss"—after he had fussed awhile—"what train did you please to come by? I understand that the carriage has been waiting there all day; indeed, I saw it come back from the pantry window

myself, and they said in the yard the last train was in afore they come away."

"I came by the train that ought to be there at half-past ten o'clock."

"Well to be sure! That must be the very train as Samuel and Humphry said they waited for; but they never has much judgment, them two men. And to let you come in a common fly, Miss!"

"I saw my father's carriage at the station, and two low-looking servants quite tipsy. Their names, however, were not Samuel and Humphry, but Jacob and Robert."

Strange servants now came thronging round, with an obsequiousness so long unknown that it quite disgusted me. No familiar face among them, none whom I could bring myself to ask how my guardian was. But from their servility to me I concluded that his time was short.

"Will you step into the small drawing-room, if you be so kind, Miss? There is a good fire there, Miss, and a lady waiting for you."

"Thank you. Take my things to my own little room, if you please; that is, if you know which room was called mine."

"Tilly knows, Miss. I'll run and fetch Tilly," cried the officious Bob.

"If Matilda Jenkins is still here, let her answer my bell as long as I remain."

And therewith I was shown into the room where the lady was expecting me. She sat with her back to the door, and I could only see that she was richly attired in full evening dress. There was a powerful smell of vinegar in the room, and two pastiles were burning. As I walked round the table she rose with some reluctance, and I confronted Mrs. Daldy.

CHAPTER XVI.

We stood for a moment, examining each other. She was fattening nicely on what she called "holy converse and spiritual outpourings at Cheltenham." She rushed forward with great enthusiasm.

"Why, Clara, darling, is it possible? Can this be you—so grown, and improved in every way? I never should have known you, I do declare! Why, you have quite a brilliant colour, and your eyes, and your hair—oh dear, how proud your sweet mother would have been! You lovely creature, I must have a kiss! What, not even your pretty hand?"

"No, Mrs. Daldy; never more my hand to a person who dared to insult my father. Me you might have insulted a thousand times, and I would have forgiven you."

"Come now, let bygones be bygones, that's a dear. Oh for a little more of the essence of Christianity!

Let us stoop to the hem of the garment of the meek and lowly"—I will not write the sacred name she used —"let us poor grovelling fellow-sinners—"

"Don't couple me with yourself, I beg." I was losing my temper, and she saw her advantage.

"Not even as a sinner, dear? I thought in my humility that we all were sinners."

"So we are; but not all hypocrites."

She kept her temper wonderfully, in all except her eyes.

"Ah, you impetuous young people cannot understand the chastened lowly heart, which nothing but heavy trials and the grace of God produce. You know, Clara, you never could."

This last truth was put in the form of an exclamation, and in such a different tone from the rest, moreover it was so true, that I could hardly help smiling.

"Since last I saw you, I have been tried severely and chastised most heavily. I bow to the rod. All works together for our spiritual good. Until that blessed day, when all the sheaves—"

"Mrs. Daldy, I as well have seen and suffered much since last we met. If I could not be hoodwinked then

by this sham religion, is it likely that I can be now? I wonder that you waste your time so."

The truth was that she talked in this strain less from hope than habit.

"Then if I must treat you, Miss Vaughan, but as a sister worldling, let us at least combine, for Providence has seen fit to make our interests the same."

"How so?" I was doing my utmost to bear with her awhile.

"First, before I tell you anything, have you as keen an eye for the perception of your own sweet interest as for the discovery of what you kindly call 'hypocrisy?' Ah well, it is all for my good."

Her rolling compendious eyes glistened at the thought that she was about to catch me here. I pretended to be caught already.

"What of it, if I have?"

"Then I will tell you something. Sit down by me, Clara."

"Thank you, I will stand."

"Now first, before I tell you anything, we must make some little arrangement for our mutual benefit, and then resolve upon united action. You must give me one

little pledge. That being done I will tell you everything, and it is of the last importance to you."

"Is it about my father?"

"No. It has nothing to do with him; it is about your uncle, who now lies at the door of death. Ah, it is all for the best. There is, I fear, no chance of his recovery, and the disposal of this splendid property is in our hands, if we know how to play our cards, and if we act together. But there is no time to be lost. Only think, 15,000*l.* a year, for it is now worth every farthing of that, besides this beautiful place. Why, Clara, all the pleasures of life will be at our feet!"

In her greedy excitement, she forgot all her piety; but I liked her better so. In a moment she saw that she had laid her wicked heart too open. In my eyes there was no co-partner flash of avarice.

"What is the matter with my poor uncle?"

"First a paralytic stroke; since that low gastric fever, and entire prostration. Do you remember when you came to your dear mother's funeral?"

"Of course, I do."

"And could you help observing how altered he was even then? The hour he heard of her death, he was

seized with violent illness, yet he would go out of doors alone, on the very day of the funeral. Something then excited him; he came home worse, and in the night was visited with a slight paralytic stroke. However, he quite recovered the use of his limbs for a time, though never his former spirits—if we can call them spirits. For several months he went about as usual, except that instead of a horse he rode a quiet pony. He saw to the property, received the Michaelmas rents, and invested large sums of money both in land and the funds; he even commenced some great improvements, for he has always been, as you know, a most skilful and liberal steward and manager."

"That I never denied. There could not be a better one."

"But suddenly, after no Christmas festivities (for he would hear of none, for the sake of your dear mother), he was found on the morning of the last day in the year bolt upright in his study chair, and fully dressed, with two pistols, loaded and cocked, on the table, no sign of life in his face or pulse, his body stiff yet limp, like a sand-bag tightly stuffed. The man who found him described it better than I can. "Poor master, which-

ever way I put him, there he stop, like a French dog doing tricks.'"

"How terrible!"

"Yes, but it was true. At first they thought it was catalepsy only; but when that passed off, paralysis remained. I wanted to send for you at once."

Here she met, for she could not help it, but did not answer, my gaze; and I knew it was a lie.

"However, I was over-ruled; and your poor uncle lay bed-ridden, but in no actual danger, until this horrid low fever came. He must have a frame of iron to have borne up as he has. The doctor says this fever is partly from the prostration of the nerves."

"Who is the doctor?" I felt almost as if I could love my uncle.

"A very eminent man. His name is Churchyard."

"That is not our old medical man. Where does this gentleman come from?"

"Cheltenham, I believe."

"Surely, you must *know* that, if he is an eminent man; living there yourself!"

I saw that she had brought him.

"Well," she answered sharply, "it matters little

where he comes from, and I have not verified his residence. I fear all the doctors in Europe could not save your poor dear uncle." And here (from habit when death was thought of) she fell into the hypocritical vein once more—"Ah, how true it is! The thing that will most avail him now, when his poor sinful frame is perishing, and the old man with all its works—"

"Thank you. I know all that. Which room does my uncle occupy?"

"Surely, you never would think of disturbing him at midnight!"

"Does death look what o'clock it is? If he is really dying, I must see him at once."

She seemed resolved to prevent me. I was determined to do it. It is needless to tell all her stratagems, and needless to say (unless I have failed to depict myself) that they proved utterly vain. I was only surprised that she did not come with me.

CHAPTER XVII.

How vast the rooms appeared to me, how endless the main passages, after the dimensions long familiar at Tossil's Barton, and Mrs. Shelfer's. I even feared to lose the way, where my childish feet had measured every step. First I hurried to my own snug room, or rooms —for I had parlour and bedroom adjoining—in the western wing, where mother used to live. Everything there was in beautiful order, a lamp and a good fire lighted; and Matilda Jenkins met me at the door.

Directly after our departure for Devonshire, Mr. Vaughan had thought fit to discharge all the old servants, except the housekeeper and Matilda. They were all in league against him, for they could not bear that the "rightful owners," whom they had known so long, should be ejected. Moreover, his discipline was far more stern than ours; for my father and mother had always ruled by love. The housekeeper, a great

friend of mine, was retained from respect and policy, and poor Tilly (who entered life through a dust-bin) from contempt of her insignificance. By that time she had risen to the rank of scullery-maid and deputy dish-washer; now she had climbed in the social scale to the position of under-housemaid.

"Why, Matilda, how well you look, and how smart! I declare you are getting quite tall. I suppose the new times agree with you better than the old."

"Oh don't say that, Miss Clara, please don't! I'd tear the gownd off my back"—looking savagely at the neat print—"if I thought it make you think that. No, I gets a little more wages, but a deal more work, and I never gets a kind word. Oh it does my heart good to see you here again, in your own house, Miss Clara dear, and evil to them as drove you out"—and she lifted the corner of her new white muslin apron;—"and I have tended your rooms all myself, though it wasn't in my part, and never let no one else touch them, ever since I was took from the kitchen, and always a jug full of flowers, Miss, because you was so fond of them."

"Thank you, Matilda. How kind of you, to be sure!"

"Many's the time I've cried over them, Miss, and the new shilling you give me, when we was little girls together. But please to call me 'Tilly,' Miss, the same as you always used."

"I can't stop to talk to you now, Tilly; how is Mrs. Fletcher?"

"Quite hearty, Miss, all but the rheumatics. Ah, she do suffer terrible from them. Us both waited up, Miss, and I to and fro the door, till the carriage come home; and then she went off to bed, and I was up with her, and never knowed when you come. But she's getting up now, Miss, to come here to see you."

"Go and stop her, at once. I will see her to-morrow. Stop, show me first your master's room; knock gently and bring out the nurse. The doctor is gone I believe."

"Yes, Miss, he left here at eight o'clock, for he had a long way to drive, and he couldn't do nothing more. But you must not go, Miss, oh pray, Miss, don't go there!"

We went along the passage, until we came to the door. I was surprised to see a new door across the lobby, very closely fitted. There was an inner door also, and the nurse did not seem very wakeful. Instead

of knocking again, Matilda retreated hastily. At last the nurse appeared, and I found her to be a very respectable woman, who had been with my mother, through several attacks of illness. A dark suspicion, which I had scarcely confessed to myself, was partly allayed hereby. After whispering for a few moments, she led me into the dimly lighted room, and to my uncle's bed.

I started back in terror. Prepared as I was for a very great change, what I saw astounded me. The face so drawn and warped aside, withered and yet pulpy, with an undercast of blue; the lines of the mouth so trenched and livid, that the screwed lips were like a bull's-eye in a blue diamond pane; and the hair, so dark and curly when last I saw him, now shredded in patches of waxy gray. The only sign of life I saw, was a feeble twitching of the bed-clothes, every now and then. The poor eyes were closed, hard, and wrinkled round; one wasted arm lay on the quilt, the hand bent up at the wrist, the fingers clutched yet flabby, and as cold as death. It was a sight for human pride to cower at, and be quelled.

"Is he like this always?"

"No," she replied, "but he has been so now for ten hours and more: generally he is taken with pain and thirst, every six hours; and it makes my heart ache to hear him moan and cry."

"Does he say anything particular then?"

God knows I was not pursuing my own fell purpose in asking this. Thank Him, I was not such a fiend as that. All I wished was to relieve him whom I pitied so.

"Yes, he opens his eyes and stares, and then he always says, and he tries to shake his head only he isn't strong enough, 'My fault, ah me, my fault, and to rob them too! If I could but see her, if I could but see her, and die!' He always says that first, and then that exhausts him so, he can hardly say 'water' after, and then he moans so melancholy, and then he goes off again."

The tears stood in her eyes, for she had a tender heart. I burst into my usual violent flood, for I never have any half-crying.

"Have you any medicine to give him?"

"No, Miss, no more; he has taken a shopful already, though he can only swallow at the time he wakes up. The doctor said to-night he could do no more; this awful

black fever must end in mortification; no medicine moves it at all."

"Did the doctor call it black fever?"

"Yes, the very worst form of typhus of the real Irish type, such as they have had once or twice in Manchester. It has settled most on the stomach, but all the blood is poisoned."

And she sprinkled herself, and the bed again, with disinfecting fluid, and threw some over me.

"Excuse me, Miss, you wouldn't allow me, so I am bound not to ask you. You know you came in dead against my will, and dead against all orders"—this was what the whispering had been about—"and if anything happens to you, Miss Vaughan, who is to have all the property, but that bad Mrs. Daldy?"

Oh! In a moment I saw the whole; though it was too black for belief, blacker than any fever that festers the human heart. This was the purpose with which that woman had sent for me. She had lied to me as to the character of the disease. She had opposed me, because she knew it the surest way to urge me. She had brought me too at night, when fevers are doubly infectious.

"You see, Miss, we are forced to keep the three windows open, and the passage doors all closed. It's a wonder I had any of the fluid left, for they never sent it up this afternoon; but I had a drop put by, no thanks to them for the same. Mrs. Daldy brought the first nurse, but she ran clean away when the fever took the turn; and they were forced to send for me, for nobody else would come near him. But my poor old man has no work, and I've minded as bad a case as this, and they say I be fever-proof. But you, Miss, you; I should never forgive myself, if anything happened to you, and in your youth and bloom. Though I could not stop you, you know I did my best. And they say you catch things most when you come off a journey."

"Jane, whatever happens, you are not to blame. I have no fear whatever; and now I am here, I will stay. It is safer so, both for myself and others."

"Well, Miss, so I have heard say. Once in for it, keep to the air. But come into this little room, if you want to talk to me, Miss. We can hear the poor gentleman move, or even sigh; and the air is a little fresher there. But we must keep the window open."

She led me into the dressing room; but even there

the same crawling creeping smell pervaded, as if a grave had been opened, when the ground was full of gas. Instead of talking to the nurse, I began to think. It broke upon me vaguely, that I had heard of some very simple remedy for a fever of this nature, and that my dear mother, who in her prosperous times was the village doctoress, had been acquainted with the case. But in the whirl of my brain, I could not bring to mind what it was. Oh what would I give, only to think of it now!

Though not, I am sorry to say, at all of a pious turn (at least if Mrs. Daldy is so), in the strong feeling of the moment, I fell upon my knees, and prayed for help. So had my mother taught me, and Mother Nature taught me now. I will not be so daring as to say that my prayer was answered. Perhaps it was only that it calmed my mind.

"Jane, have they been brewing lately?" Alas the bathos! But I can't help it.

"Yes, Miss; last Thursday and Friday. They won't let me go near the kitchen part: but I know it all the same."

"Go and get me a nice jug of fresh yeast. I will watch your master."

She stared, and hesitated; but saw that I was in earnest.

"I don't know where to find it, Miss; and none of them will come near me; and they'll stop me too if they can. Why they won't bring my food to the door, but put it half-way down the passage. They wanted to lock me in, only I wouldn't stand that; and they break all the plates and dishes, and to-day they sent word that my dinner must come in at the window to-morrow."

"Low cowards and zanies! Now find the yeast, Jane, if you have to search for an hour. They must all be gone to bed now, except Matilda Jenkins; and she dare not stop you if you say you have my orders."

"Bless you, Miss; she'll run away as if I was a ghost."

"Then call to her, that I say she must go to bed directly."

After a few more words, Jane went her way stealthily, like a thorough-bred thief; and I was left alone with my poor dying uncle. Wonderful as it seemed to me, I felt now a tender affection for him, I the resolute, the consistent, the bitter Clara Vaughan. Even if he had told me that moment, that he had plotted my father's

death, I would have perilled my life for his; because I should have known that he was sorry. Yet I was full of cold fear, lest he should awake to consciousness, and utter that awful cry, while I alone was with him, in the dead hour of night.

Sooner than I expected, the nurse came back with a jug of beautiful yeast, smelling as fresh as daybreak. We put it outside the window on the stone sill, to keep it cool and airy. She had seen no one except Matilda, who was waiting for me, and crying dreadfully, predicting my certain death, and her own too; if she should have to attend me. She kept at a most respectful distance from Jane; and, with all her affection, was glad to be clear of me for the night.

For nearly two hours, the nurse and I sat watching, with hardly a spoken word, except that I asked one question.

"How often has Mrs. Daldy been to see my uncle?"

"She would hardly leave his bedside, until the fever declared itself. Since then she has not been once."

Broad awake at that strange hour, and in that strange way, I began to pass through the stereoscope of my brain the many strange slides of my life. Of all of

these, the last for the moment seemed the strangest. Suddenly we heard a low feeble moan. Running into the bedroom, there we saw the poor sick one with his eyes wide open, vainly attempting to rise. I put my arms around him, and raised him on the pillow. He tried to say 'thank you,' for he was always a gentleman in his manners; then he gazed at me with hazily wondering eyes. Then he opened his mouth in a spasmodic way, and began that bitter cry.

Ere he closed his mouth again, I poured well into his throat a table-spoonful of yeast, handed to me by Jane. To my great pleasure, it glided beyond the black tongue; and I gave him two more spoonfuls, while he was staring at me with a weak and rigid amazement.

"No water, Jane, not a drop of water! It will work far better alone. He doesn't know what it is, and he thinks he has had his water. Keep him thirsty that he may take more."

As he lay thus in my arms, I felt that one side was icily cold, and the other fiery hot. His face looked most ghastly and livid, but there was not that mystical gray upon it, like the earth-shine on the moon, which shows when the face of man is death's mirror, and the

knee of death on man's heart. In a minute he slid from my grasp, down on the pillow again, and, with a long-drawn sigh, became once more stiff and insensible. My hope was faint indeed, but still it was hope: if he had hope's vitality, he might yet be saved.

The rest of that night was passed by the nurse and myself in heavy yet broken sleep. Jane assured me that there was no chance of my poor uncle becoming conscious again, for at least six hours. I was loth to forego my watch, and argued that the dose we had given might cut short this interval; but lo—while I kept repeating at weary and weary periods, that I could do no harm, since the physician gave up, and I might do good—sleep, the lover of repetition, laid his hand alike on my formula and myself. Dear Judy's howl was in my dream, and Mrs. Shelfer's never ceasing prattle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Cold and fresh was the morning air, and the open window invited the sounds of country life. Who could think of fever with the bright dew sparkling on the lawn, the lilac buds growing fat enough to claim their right of shadow, the pleasant ring of the sharpening scythe, and the swishing sweep of the swathe? From the stable-yard, round the corner, came the soothing hiss of the grooms, the short stamp of the lively steed (I fancied I knew my own favourite "Lilla"), and the gruff "Stand still, mare, wull'e?" Far down the avenue whistled the cowboy, waddle-footed, on his way to the clover leys, or the milkmaid sung with the pail on her hip, and the deer came trooping and stooping their horns along. Was it not one of my own pet robins, who hopped on the window-sill, peered bravely at himself in the jug, and tried to remember the last of his winter notes?

But it is cold, Jane, very cold indeed; and we have

never been to bed; and now the mowers have descried us, why do they stop their work, and shake their heads together so, and keep outside the ranunculus bed, and agree that the grass beneath our windows does not require cutting? Why, if they were Papists, they would cross themselves, and that saves many an oath. But the grass does want cutting, Jane. It cannot have been cut for a week. I will call to them. No, it might disturb my uncle.

There is no sound from the bed-room yet: all deep and deadly silence. I will go and see.

There my patient lies, just as when I saw him first, except that I have arranged the wreck of his hoary locks, and applied a lotion to his temple on the burning side. And yet, now I look closer, the face is not quite so livid; or is it the difference between the candle-light and the morning ray?

Even while I looked, he started up, as if my eyes revived him. He did not moan or cry; but opened wide his filmy eyes, and gazed feebly and placidly at me. For a time he did not know me: then a great change gradually crept through his long faltering gaze. Fearing the effects of excitement upon him, I tried to

divert his attention by another good dose of yeast. Three times he took it with resignation like a well-trained child, but his eyes all the time intent on me. Presently they began to swim and swerve; the effort of the faint blood-tissued brain and the exertion of swallowing had been too much for his shattered powers. He fell off again into the comatose state, but with a palpable difference. The pulse, which had throbbed on the hot side only, could now be felt most feebly moving in the other wrist, and the tension of the muscles was relaxed: circulation was being restored and balanced, and the breathing could now be traced, short as it was and irregular.

I have not time to describe all the symptoms of gradual improvement, and I have not the medical knowledge needful to do so clearly. Enough that the six-hour interval was shortened that day by half, that the breathing became more regular, and a soft perspiration broke through the clogged and clammy pores. Jane wanted to second this by an additional blanket, but I feared to allow it in a case of so utter prostration. When the perspiration was over, then I prescribed the blanket for fear of a chill reaction.

At every return of consciousness, our patient made an effort to speak, but I hushed him with my hand on his lips, and he even managed to smile, when he found that I *would* be obeyed. In the evening he tried to open his arms to me, and then tried to push me away, in some faint recollection of the nature of his disorder. To me the interest was so intense, and the delight so deep, that if I had lost him now, it would surely have broken my heart.

At sunset of that day, as nurse and I sat near the dressing-room window, watching the slant rays flickering on the sward, and the rooks alighting and swinging over their noisy nests, a black cloud hung for a moment just above the sun, a black cloud with a vivid edge of gold. It tempered the light in a peculiar manner, and seemed to throw it downwards. Peering through my fingers at it, for it was very beautiful, I saw a whitish mist or vapour steaming and hovering above the disk of the setting sun, between my eyes and that golden marge. I wondered what this could be; there was no heat to cause strong evaporation, nor any mist or dewy haze about, nor was the sun "drawing water." But what I saw was like that trembling twinkle of the air,

which we often observe on a meadow footpath in the hot forenoon of July. I drew Jane's attention to it, not expecting any solution, but just for something to say.

"Dear me, Miss, don't you know what that is? I see it every evening; it will be twice as plain when the sun goes down, and then it will be quite white."

"Well, what is it? Why can't you tell me? Is everything here a secret?"

I was rather irritable, but vexed with myself for being so. Too much excitement and too little sleep were the causes.

"No, Miss, there's no secret at all about that. Every one knows what that is. It's only the scum that rises through the grass from the arched pool that takes all the drains of the house. Some of the arch fell in they say, and the ground shakes when they mow it; they are afraid to roll there."

"Is it possible? And you knew it, a practised nurse like you! Did my uncle know it?"

"I am sure, Miss, I can't tell: most likely not, or he would have had it mended. He hates things out of repair. But it can't do any harm, with the mould and the grass above it."

"Can't it indeed? And you can see it rise. Shut all the bedroom windows in a moment, Jane. I'll shut this."

She thought my wits were wandering, from what I had gone through; nevertheless she obeyed me.

It happened that I had attended, at Isola's urgent request, one lecture of the many delivered by Dr. Ross. She forgot what the subject was to be. It proved to be an unsavoury and "unlady-like" one—Mephitis. Isola wanted to run away, but I have none of that nonsense about me, when human life is concerned, and listened with great attention, and even admiration; for he handled the matter eloquently and well.

"Now, Jane, throw all the doors open, and the lobby window that looks in the other direction. When do you think it will be possible to move our poor patient from these rooms? The air here is deadly poison."

"Well I'm sure, Miss! And he couldn't have a nicer nor a more airy room; and all my things in order too, and so handy, and so many cupboards!"

"Out of this poison he must go. When can he be moved?"

"Well, Miss, he might be moved to-morrow, if we could only get plenty of hands, and do it cleverly."

"Surely we can have plenty of hands. There used to be twenty-five servants here; and I have not heard that my uncle has lessened the number."

"No, Miss; but save and keep us, we shan't get one of them here."

"Nonsense! I will have them, or they leave the house. Of course I won't peril their lives. We shall only want two or three; and they may take a bath of disinfecting stuff, with all their clothes on, before they come; and they may smoke all the while."

The nurse laughed grimly, and shook her gray head.

"And we will fumigate, Jane, fumigate tremendously. Surely Englishmen have more self-respect than to be such babies, and you a woman, and I a girl, shaming them out of face."

"It doesn't matter, Miss; they won't come. I know them well, the lot I mean that are in the house now."

"Very well, Jane, we'll have Gamekeeper Hiatt, and his eldest son; they are men I know. And if that is not enough, we'll send to Gloucester for Thomas Hen-

wood. But why don't you open the lobby door, as I told you?"

"If you please, Miss, I can't. They have fastened it outside."

"Do you mean to say that they have dared to lock us in?"

"Indeed I do, Miss; we have been fastened in since the morning."

"And pray, why did you not tell me?"

"Because I feared to excite you, Miss. I know your temper when you are wronged, ever since you was that high; and in this fever air, excitement is sure to kill you. Brutes! But I suppose they don't know it."

"They know it well; at least the master-spirit does. And for that very reason I will crush my indignation. Since I was that high, Jane, I have passed through much tribulation, and have dropped my lady-heiress tone. I can now command myself."

"Then, Miss, I will show you what they sent this morning, round the handle of the coffee-jug. I was afraid to let you see it before." She gave me a twist of paper, on which was written as follows:—

"For the safety of the household, Mrs. Fletcher orders

that the persons in the fever-room be allowed no communication with the other servants. The intercepting door is fastened, because a most sinful un-Christian act was perpetrated last night. Due supplies will be delivered once a-day, at 10 A.M. No empty vessels and no correspondence received. Any attempt to break these rules will be punished by suspension of supplies. Servants are forbidden to come beneath the sick-room windows. May the Lord have you in His keeping, in His tender mercy, according to His holy will. You are requested to read Philippians i. 8—11 inclusive. There are three holy bibles on the drawers and dressing-tables."

When I had read this, and perceived, by the blasphemy at the end, that it could proceed from no other than that awful woman, I confess that my spirit was cowed within me. Not from selfish fear, nor yet from the taming of passion, but from the lowering thought that I belonged to the same race of being as the author of such Satanity. Presently, I became too indignant to speak, or even think. It added, if that were possible, to my indignation, that I had seen her leave the house, about nine o'clock that morning, in our best close carriage. She kept the windows up until she was past

the lawn and the light iron gates, beyond the arcade of roses; then, at the first turn in the avenue, she let down the glass and gracefully kissed her hand to me. I did not believe, however, that she was gone back to Cheltenham. With so much at stake in our house, and depending on her direction, she would surely stop in the neighbourhood, if only to watch the course of events.

Sooner than I dared to expect, I regained the command of myself; horror within me was stronger than wrath, and stronger than either became the resolve to survive and win. "There can be no God," I exclaimed, in my presumptuous ignorance, "if this scheme of the devil is permitted to triumph."

First I tried the door, which severed us from the rest of the house. My uncle's rooms were in the western wing, very near those which my dear mother had occupied, and not very far from my own. They formed one floor of the western gable; the three bedroom windows and that of the dressing-room looked to the west, while the great lobby window, from which I had seen Mrs. Daldy's departure, looked southward along the avenue, the curve of which could be seen

also from the bedroom windows. An oaken door, at the end of the main passage, cut off the rooms in this storey of the gable from all the rest of the house. This door Jane had left locked from the inside, fearing lest others should lock her in, as they had threatened to do. But now we found that a strong iron bolt had been fixed upon the outside, while we were asleep in the morning, and that we had no chance of forcing it.

Next I asked Jane, whether she thought that the house, now Mrs. Daldy was gone, would be still in the hands of our enemies. Would not Mrs. Fletcher at once re-assert her authority? Might not Matilda Jenkins be expected to fly to the rescue? The nurse, knowing all the politics of the servants' hall, assured me that there was no hope of either of these events. Robert, a drunken Wesleyan, turned out of the sect in Cheltenham, was Mrs. Daldy's lieutenant, and would take all care of Matilda, to whose good graces he had been making overture. As for Mrs. Fletcher, she was probably in the same plight as ourselves. From what I heard about Robert, I began to believe that he had private orders to disown me at the station, for the

double purpose of yielding a tit-bit of insolence, and warning of my arrival.

However, that mattered very little; but out of those rooms I must get, either by door or by window; and that, too, without delay. Do they expect to triumph so easily over Clara Vaughan? And in her father's house? The windows were about twenty feet from the ground, as nearly as I could guess, and the rooms beneath were empty. At once I resolved to attempt an escape that way, and to do so before the moon, which was southing now, should shine on the western aspect. Good Jane was terrified at the thought; and then, upon my persisting, implored me to let her make the attempt, if it must be made at all.

"Now, Jane, no more, if you please. We can't waste time about that. You have a husband partly dependent upon you, and several children to think of. For me nobody cares." But I hoped somebody did. "And you know I am far more active and much lighter than you are. Help me out with the feather bed."

The little bed in the dressing-room, which she had to sleep on, was speedily brought to the window, and dropped just underneath it. It fell upon the grass with

a pleasing and quiet flop. Then the two strong bell-ropes, already cut down and plaited together, were tied round the bars of the double window sashes, the lower sash being thrown up to the full extent, the glass pressed quietly out with a pair of wet towels, and the splinters removed, so as not to cut the rope. The latter still failed to reach more than half-way to the ground, but I would venture the drop if I could only descend so far. After winding a linen sheet around my body and dress, with the end tied round one ankle, so as to leave me free use of my limbs, I sat upon the window-sill in the broad shadow, and calculated my chances. Should I begin the descent with face, or with back, to the wall? Face to the wall I resolved on, for though I should have to drop backward so, yet what I feared most of all was having the back of my head crushed against the house. Next to this I dreaded a sprain of the ankle, but all our family are well-knit and straight in the joint.

So I launched myself off, beginning as gently as could be, Jane having firm hold of one hand, until I was well on the voyage. Though not well versed in calisthenic arts, I got on famously almost as far as

the end of the rope, keeping away from the wall by the over-saling of the window-sill, and the rapid use of my feet. Then I rested a moment on a projecting ledge—called, I believe, a "stringing-course" — and away hand below hand again. But I struck my knuckles terribly against that stringing-course, and very nearly lost hold from the pain of the blow; then bending my body forward I gave one good push at the wall, and shutting both eyes, I believe, let go the rope altogether. Backward I fell, and rolled over upon the feather bed. I was not even stunned, but feared for a moment to try if my limbs were sound.

There I sat and stripped off the winding sheet. Presently, up I got, and, in my triumph, alas! could not help crying "All right, Hurrah!" like a foolish little child. In a moment I saw that my cry had been heard, where it should not have been. A rapid flitting of lights along the lower windows and in the stableyard, and I knew that chase would be given.

But after leaving my father's house in such a dignified manner, was it likely that I would give in and be caught? Now, Clara, you could beat all your nurses in running, off and away like the wind! Away

I went full speed towards the shade of the avenue, while Jane had the wit to scream out of the window, "Help! Help! Here's the house on fire!" This made some little diversion; I had a capital start, and it was but half a mile to the lodge where old Whitehead lived. Once there, I should care for nobody. I must have escaped very easily, for my feet seemed as swift as a deer's; but, as my luck would have it, the light iron gates between the lawn and the park were fastened. What on earth should I do? I saw men running across the lawn, and, what was worse, they saw me. In vain I pulled at the gates; they rattled, but would not yield. Had I owned true presence of mind, I should have walked boldly up to the men, and dared them to touch me fresh from the fever-room. In the flurry of the moment I never thought of that, but darted into the shrubbery, and crouched among thick laurels. Presently I heard them rush down the main drive and begin the search, with some heavy swearing. Two of them came to the very clump I was hiding in, and pushed a pitchfork almost into my side, but the stupid fellows had lanterns, which blinded them to the moonlight. On they went with grumblings and

growlings, which told me exactly where to shun them. Judging at length, from the silence, that the search had passed to the right, I slipped from my tangled lair, and glided away to the left, beyond the shrubbery spring, where a little gate, as I knew, led to a glade in the park. The deep ha-ha which I had feared to jump in the dark, because of the loose stones at the bottom, was here succeeded by a high oak paling, and probably through that gate had come the murderer of my father.

With a cold shudder at the remembrance, I stole along through the shadowy places, and had almost reached the little gate, when I saw two of the searchers coming straight towards me. To the right of me was the park-paling, on the left a breastwork of sod, which I could not climb without being clearly seen; to fly was to meet the enemy; should I yield, and be baffled after all; insulted too, most likely, for I knew that the men were tipsy?

In my hand was the tightly-wound sheet, used as a rope to confine my dress. I had folded it short and carried it, on the chance of its proving useful. In a moment I was under the palings in deep shadow, with

the white sheet thrown around me, falling from my forehead, and draped artistically over the right arm. Stock still I stood against the black boards, and two great coils of long black hair flowed down the winding sheet. The men came up, tired of the chase, and grumbling; and by their voices I knew them for my good friends Jacob and Bob. Suddenly, they espied a tall, white figure, of tremendous aspect. They stopped short, both tongue and foot, and I distinctly heard their teeth chatter. With a slow and spectral motion, I raised my draped white arm, and fetched a low, sepulchral moan. Down fell the lantern, and, with a loud yell, away went the men, as hard as their legs could carry them.

Laughing heartily, I refolded my sheet, and taking the short cut across the park to the lodge where old Whitehead lived, arrived, without having met even my old friend "Tulip."

The old man, in hot indignation, drew forth his battered musket—for he had once been in the militia—and swore that he would march upon the —— rogues at once. Instead of that I sent him for the two Hiatts, and the village constable; and soon, without invitation, half the village attended. With my torn dress tucked

up by good Mrs. Whitehead, and a hat on my head, newly bought for her clean little grandchild, I set forth again in the moonlight, at the head of a faithful army, to recover my native home.

Hiatt easily opened the gate, which had defied my flurried efforts, and we presented ourselves at the main entrance, a force that would frighten a castle. It is needless to say that we carried all before us. The state of siege was rescinded, Mrs. Fletcher and Tilly set free, all the ringleaders turned away neck and crop, and what was far more important, my poor uncle removed, without being conscious of it, to a sweet and wholesome room. The sturdy Gloucestershire yeomen scorned all idea of danger.

Tired with all my adventures, before I slept that night—still near my uncle's bed—two reflections came dreamily over my mind.

The first was a piece of vanity. "Ah, Mrs. Daldy, you little know Clara Vaughan!"

The second was, "Dear me, how Conrad would be astonished at this! And how strange that his father should thus have saved my uncle's life! For he must have died, if left in that noisome room."

CLARA VAUGHAN.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

Before that week was over, my uncle could sit up in bed for a short time every day, being duly propped in a downy nest of pillows. One arm, however, remained quite impotent, and part of one side rigid and numb. His recovery was slow and tedious, as might well be expected with one who had been dragged not from the jaws but the very throat of death. For a long time also his mind was feeble and dim, a mirror overcast by the vapours of the body.

To me, who am fond of observing, in my own little childish way, it was interesting as well as delightful to note how, day by day, the mind and body, hand in hand, rose stronger. More than all was I taught, and humbled in my own conceit, by taking heed how tardily came back the power to guide and control the imagination. That object-glass of the mind—not achromatic even in first-rate intellects—had long been out of

the focal distance from the lens of reason's eye. Upon it had been glancing loose distorted images, rendered home imperfectly, if at all, to the retina of the brain. Herein its state was the very opposite to that of my own phrenoscope. I have no large imagination; but the images it presents are vivid, and I see well round them Every one of them is not cast, but cut, on my sensorium. Whether I can strike them off in words—whether my telegraph can print its message—is quite another question, and beside its purpose. Having rendered home to me the idols (oftentimes inverted, though distinct) it leaves expression and judgment to do their best with the copyright.

Now, both in fabric and in mould, my uncle's mind was different. Naturally his powers were far superior, but he seemed to take no pride in them. No dark and settled purpose had ever thrown its shadow, and even its weight, upon them; nor had they felt, so far as I knew, the rough grasp of adversity. Therefore they were longer in recovering from the blow, than I think my own would have been.

There were few things, among the many desired by Mrs. Daldy, which she failed to reconcile with her

strong sense of religion. "There is not one"—I have heard her say—"not one of the things we believe to be for our good, which we should scruple to lay before the Throne of Grace. Even the throbbings of that little unregenerate heart"—Clara Vaughan's to wit, who had kicked her that morning, quite by accident of course—"even they are known and sifted there"—slight confusion of metaphor caused by strong conviction of sin—"Infinite mercy knows the things that be for our edification, and confirmation in the faith. Yes, backsliding sinner, the want of real heart-felt spiritual life can be supplied by prayer alone. Is it not so in your experience, Elder?" "Prayer, my dear Madam, and searching of the heart. Oh the depth of the wickedness of the unconverted heart!" And he took another glass of sherry. That night I remember she worked very hard, for her; and the next day she presented me with markers the size of a gallows, progged with many holes; on one was done in cross-stitch, "Pray without ceasing," and upon the other "Wrestle thou in prayer. Gen. xxxii. 24." Both of these I threw into the fire there before her eyes.

From this it will be clear, that in her devotions she

still remembered me, and doubtless prayed in good Scriptural phraseology for my release from this wicked world. Dr. Churchyard's last report had raised her terror to the highest pitch, and instead of wrestling in prayer, she had run away in high panic, upon hearing that the fever-nurse was seen at large the night before. "We must use the means of grace," she said to Mrs. Fletcher, before she locked her in, "and accept the mercies vouchsafed to us. And it would be sinful, dear Mrs. Fletcher, in me to neglect such a warning as this."

It was wise, as well as righteous, in her to keep aloof for a time, while her devices worked their consummation. For the present it appeared to me that they were failing signally. My uncle was regaining strength of mind and body; while native air, a sense of triumph, and daily exercise, kept me in blooming health. My patient, who otherwise could hardly bear me to leave him for an hour, insisted upon my taking a long ride every day. Lilla was charmed, and so was I, with the sweet spring air, and the rich familiar scenery. And how it did make me eat! Thankful indeed I ought to be, and am, that it pleased God to spare me that awful and deadly pestilence. But the worst injury done by cant-

ing hypocrites is, that the repulsion they create drives away others from good. Truly I may say, that for days after being in contact with that slimy sanctity, I could not say my own prayers, as a little child should do.

Of that fever there had been three fatal cases in the village, before it entered our house; and I found that it was spreading rapidly. With my uncle's authority, I had the drainage surveyed and amended at once; and so the pest was stayed. Of course we did not neglect our own weak point; and the crawling noisome smell was no longer perceived in the room, nor the white vapour on the grass.

And so three weeks went by; no news from London or Devonshire, no explanation between my uncle and myself, no arrangements as to my expectations in life. As yet my uncle was too weak to bear any sort of excitement, and seemed desirous only to be passive in my hands. His eyes always followed me to every part of the room, and he would even be propped on the sofa to see me ride down the avenue; and there I always found him watching for my return. Meanwhile I yearned to be once more in a certain little room with a north aspect, opposite a cheesemonger's shop in an obscure

street of London. Nightly I dreamed of Giudice, and daily I dreamed of dear Isola and Conrad. The dog in the stableyard, who had hitherto owned no especial attractions for me, suddenly found himself petted, and coaxed, and fed (which he thought much more of) to the scandal of Mrs. Fletcher, and the great alarm of the grooms, who would rather not have me there. Moreover, the dog himself, though I strove to invest him with every chivalrous attribute, was of a low and ungenial order, adorned with no graces of mind, and little taste, except for bones and gravy. But perhaps my standard was too high: peradventure I even commenced with more prejudice than a bulldog's. Be that as it may—and if I can see round things, I ought to see round myself—every day fell heavier and heavier from the fair balance of time; and every night the stars—for there was now no moon—looked wearier in the heavens, and less inclined for business. How long, how long shall you go round the pole in your steady pacing way, as if the sky were for auction, and you were pacing the lots; while I, with more fire in me than you can strike or steal, am ditched like a glow-worm kicked under a dock-leaf, and see no polestar at all?

Here is May, the height of May: I am full of life and spirit: the garb of death, like an April cloud, blows over. Let me see. Last birthday I was eighteen: I have known more troubles than years, and enjoyed no youth as yet. Last year I spent in growing, and pining, and starving. Now the Power, that balances earth and heaven, has filled me with joy and light.

Neither am I renegade to my life, in opening wide my heart to this flood of love and happiness. Still am I set upon one strong purpose. Still am I sworn, and will not repent, that if filial duty demand it, I will trample love under my feet, and cut the throat of happiness.

During most of this time, I had no idea where the queen of hypocrites was; though doubtless she knew all that was happening to us. As soon as he heard of my uncle's surprising rally, Dr. Churchyard came over, and claimed all the merit for his own last prescription. Brought face to face with the awkward fact that the medicine had not been procured, he was not in the least disconcerted, but found that we had misunderstood him, the prescription to which he referred was the one before the last. At any rate, he enhanced his own fame

immensely, and became "instrumental under Providence" in killing more people than ever. In reply to Mrs. Fletcher, for I would not deign to ask him, he stated that the excellent and devoted Mrs. Daldy had not been seen lately in Cheltenham. Her son, however, was there, and foremost in the ranks of Pump-room Lady-killers. Just what he was fit for.

The doctor entertained a belief, and spread the report in Cheltenham, that Dorcas was lodged in a humble cot among the haunts of pestilence, imperilling her life and lavishing her substance to relieve the fever-stricken. This being more than I could stand, I asked the worthy doctor—who, after all, was a man of the world—what three wealthy persons Dorcas had carried with her. At first he feigned not to understand me, then looked sly, and changed the subject cleverly. Of course I referred to the well-known fact, that she supported her grandeur and her son's extravagance by playing an admirable rubber. She was playing a better one now.

Dr. Churchyard finished by writing another prescription, which, after his departure, I handed to the husband of Venus, legitimate disposer of mineral medicines.

CHAPTER II.

LONDON! London! was still the cry of my heart; and was I not summoned thither by duty long ago? What might become, during all this time, of the man whom I was bound to watch at every turn, and whom I was now in a better condition to deal with? My first visit, every morning, was to my parents' graves, and neither of them would be there but for his ruthless hand. As I sat there how lonely I felt! how sadly forlorn in the world, be my lot wealth or poverty, victory or defeat!

One morning as I sat there my spirit was moved by dreams of the night before, and I vowed, in that bodily but invisible presence, that none, except one whose name I whispered, should ever kneel on that turf hand in hand with me.

Borne out of my usual vein by the deed myself had done, I entered the ancient church, always left open

for me, and, kneeling at the altar-rails, with many a Vaughan supine in prayer, pennons, helms, and trophies round me, stately dames in marble white, and old crusaders clutching still the cross—there I made my vow upon the knee-cupped stones, that if he claimed me not, the race should end with me.

It was a presumptuous and unholy act, with all around me quelled by time, with ages laid aside in dust, with many a stouter heart and larger mind than mine, helpless even to superintend the wasting of his tenement, with all his bygone bliss and woe, stanchest love and deadliest hate, less eloquent now than the fly whom the spider has caught in his skull.

Returning across the park, after a warm interview with "Tulip," who insisted mainly upon having his ears well scratched, I found my uncle in his snug wheel-chair, waiting near the side-door for me to help and accompany him forth. This was our best way to take him out, because of the steps at the front-door. He had not yet been in the open air since his terrible illness, but, judging by my own experience, I thought that he pined for the breeze, and, after long council, it was resolved to trust him forth this day. With all his

heart he was longing to be out; but, instead of expressing impatience, smiled gratefully at me. I now observed that he had a sweet and winning smile—a gift bestowed not rarely on faces of a sombre cast.

In return for it I kissed him, and we sailed smoothly out. How he revelled, to be sure, in the first clear breath from the lips of heaven! Stretching one poor arm forth—the other he could not move—he tried to spread himself like a flower to the sun. Then he drew long draughts of liquid freedom, and was for a time as one intoxicated. In the glorious crystal bath he seemed to float away from earth. Coming to himself at length, he looked at me, and said, "Now John may go, if he pleases." A year ago he would have said, "Go, John," and no more. But illness is a great refiner. When John was out of sight he allowed free vent to the tears of joy and gratitude, whereof, in my opinion, he had no call to be ashamed. I kissed him many times. My warm impassioned nature always felt for and delighted in any touch like this. Then he placed his better hand on the cold and rigid one, lifting this with that, and poured forth silent thanks to the Giver of all good things.

"Clara, darling," at length he said, "how can I ever show you a thousandth part of my gratitude for all the lovingkindness you have heaped on me? Coals of fire, indeed! and they have warmed my selfish heart. With loathsome death before your face, in all the pride and bloom of early youth and richest—"

I will not repeat his words, because it would not become me; but I am forced by all that has happened to show what his feelings were.

"And all this for me—me who have been your bitterest enemy, who have turned you out of your father's house, and caused your mother's death!" Here I stopped him, lest he should be overcome.

"Dear uncle, talk no more of this—never even think of it. The fault was all my own. You know I would not stop, often as you asked me. There always was a bar between us, and it was my obstinacy."

"No, it was my pride. Clara, in my better mind I loved you all along. How could I help admiring your truth and courage and devotion to your father? Although I own that you were very bitter against me, yet, if I had only used the proper means, I might have got the better of it. If I had told you all my story,

you would have pitied more even than condemned me. But my pride forbade, and I made the common mistake of regarding you as a child, because you were that in years. I forgot to allow for the forcing powers of grief. Even now, pulled down as I am, and humbled by the wisdom of Heaven, I cannot tell you my strange history without the acutest pain."

"Then I am sure, uncle, I will never let you do it."

"Yes, it is my duty, and the sooner done the better. Rescued though I am, for the present, by your wonderful courage and skill, I feel that one more blow, even a slight one now, and time for me is ended. But if it were God's will to cut me off to-morrow, I should die in happiness, having made my peace, and won your kind forgiveness."

"You shall not tell me now at any rate. And I won't have you talk so, uncle. Mind, I am head-nurse still. Now come and see how lovely the ranunculus are getting."

I began to wheel him over the grass and gather flowers (which he played with like a child), to change, if possible, the current of his thoughts. Stupid thing! I took the wrong way to do it.

"Oh, uncle dear! you will laugh at me, and say I am as bad as ever; but as soon as you get better I want to be off again, kind and good as you are to me."

He trembled so violently, that I feared the chair would be upset.

"What, Clara, can't you live with me even now? Everything shall be yours, as it ought to be. I will never meddle with you in any way, but keep to some lonely corner, and not see you very often. Oh, Clara! dear Clara! don't go away! You know I am quite helpless, and I can't live long, and you are all in all to me, and I am so proud of you, darling! But it is not for myself I care. I cannot tell, much less can you, what mischief may be done if you leave this house again. That low, crafty woman will be back again directly—she who made cowards of all the household, and acted the coward herself, who left me to die in my lonely bed, while she took all my keys. If her treachery succeeds, I shall rise from my grave. And I know she will poison me yet, if she gets the chance, and can make anything by it."

It was the first time he had spoken to me of Mrs. Daldy, and I was amazed at his bitterness, for I had

heard of no quarrel between them. What on earth did it mean?

"Don't go, Clara!" he implored me, with the cold sweat on his forehead, and every line in his poor thin face a-quivering. "Don't go, my darling, blessed Clara! I have had none to love for years and years, and to love you is so sweet! If you go I must die at once, and, worse than that, die wretched in the knowledge that you will be robbed."

He fell back in the chair, from which, in his excitement, he had striven to rise, and for some minutes there he lay insensible. When I had succeeded in bringing him to himself, he looked at me so piteously, with so much death in his eyes, that I promised, with a sinking heart, never to leave him more, except upon absolute necessity, until he should be well, or need my care no longer.

He even tried to persuade me not to go to London for the things I had left there, but to send a trusty person to pack and bring them home. To this, however, I could not yield, feeling, as I did, that, after all my love for Isola, and all her kindness to me, I was bound to see her and say farewell; and what harm

could there possibly be in so short an absence? My uncle wished me to bring her down for a good long visit, but this at such a time could not be thought of. Moreover, lively, impulsive Idols would have grown very long-faced in a dull sick house, which ours must be for the present. It was settled at last that I should go to London the following Monday, stay there one entire day, and come back the day after with all my trifling chattels. One thing more my uncle proposed which I would not hear of. It was, that he should transfer to me, by deed of gift, all the estate, both real and personal, reserving only a small annuity for himself, and a sum of 10,000*l.* for some special purpose, which he would disclose to me at leisure. Thus, he said, he should feel as if justice had been done, and there would be some security against Mrs. Daldy's schemes. Of the latter I felt no fear whatever, and thought it the effect of a shaken mind that he attached so much importance to them. Under no circumstances would I think, for a moment, of allowing him so to divest himself. Money, to any amount, I could have, though I wanted very little, seeing that now, once more, a solemn duty would withdraw me from my long pursuit, and from

all the frivolities which many girls delight in. I begged my uncle to appoint an honest steward for the estate, and to assign me a moderate yearly allowance, which would save much trouble. To this he at last consented, and proposed for me so large a revenue, that, after removing the last cipher, I had more than I knew how to spend. The first thing I did was to send the kind farmer the residue of the sum he had lent me, together with interest at ten per cent., which did not seem excessive, considering that he had no security.

And now, with the utmost anxiety, I looked forward to the time when my poor uncle should be strong enough to tell me, without risk, that history of himself which he had distinctly promised me. Surely it must shed some light on the mystery of my own. This thought, as well as the sense of duty, reconciled me in some measure to the suspension of my life-long search. He would have told me everything then and there, in his warm gratitude for my undertaking; but I durst not let him. He was already fatigued with so much talking, and when the stimulus of the fresh air was gone, he suffered a serious relapse.

CHAPTER III.

On the following Monday, my poor uncle being rather better again, I set off for London, as had been determined, and arrived there late in the afternoon. It had been proposed to send a servant with me, but I had been too long accustomed to independence, and also had reasons of my own for refusing. I was to receive, on the morrow, an account, by telegraph, of my patient's health and spirits, and promised to give, in return, some tidings of myself. Mrs. Shelfer had not been apprised of my coming, because she would have been sure to tell Miss Isola, whom, as well as her brother, I wished to take by surprise. Dear Isola had often inquired about my family, but only knew that I was an orphan, much reduced in the world, poor, and all alone. Much as I loved her, I knew quite well that she could not keep a secret, and whenever she teased me about my "iron mask," I retorted upon her that she had first to discover the secret of her own home.

As we rushed towards the mighty city, what a flush was in my cheeks, what a flutter in my heart! Whom might I not see even upon the platform, or, at any rate, in the streets, and, poverty being removed, what obstacle could there be between us? Not that I intended to resign myself to affection, and lead a life of softness, until I had discharged to the utmost my duty to the dead. Yet some sort of pledge might pass—some surety there might be, that neither of us would feel thereafter quite alone in the world. But how could I tell that he even cared about me? Well, I had a strong suspicion. In some things the eyes are the best detective police. Only I had always been so unlucky. Was it not too good luck for me ever to be true?

Mrs. Shelfer's door was opened at my knock, not by her own little bustling self, nor even by shock-headed and sly "Charley," but by a short stout man of affable self-importance, with a semi-Jewish face, and a confidential air. He had a pot of porter in one hand and a paper-roll in the other, a greasy hat on his head, and one leg of his trousers had lost the lower half. Upon learning my name and object, he took no notice whatever of me, but put up his paper-roll for a trumpet, and

shouted along the passage, "Balaam, here's a kick! I'm bothered if it's all lies, after all. Never dreamed the old gal could tell a word of truth. Had a higher opinion of her. Blowed if the young woman herself ain't come!"

"Easy there, Balak"—the mouth of the speaker was full—"keep the door, I tell you. Never gets a bit of time to my victuals. She's up to a plant, I doubt. Just let me have a squint at her." Out came another man with a like appearance and air, and a blade-bone in his hand, whereat he continued to gnaw throughout the interview. It was indeed a squint with which he favoured me, and neither of them would move for me to pass.

"Pray what is the meaning of all this?" I asked, in my grandest manner. "Surely I have not mistaken the house I lived in. This, I believe, is Mrs. Shelfer's house?"

Instead of answering me, they closed the door enough to put the slide-chain on, leaving me still outside, where, with boiling indignation, I heard myself discussed; the cabman looking on with an experienced grin.

"Well, Balaam, now, and what do you think of that party?"

"Uncommon fine young gal, and doosed mannersome too; but it don't follow, for all that, that the thing is on the square, you know. Have she got any luggage, Balak?"

"No, mate. And that looks fishy, now one come to think on it. Stop, let me have another look."

"No; leave that to me. Slip the chain out, Balak: and keep your foot behind the door. She can't push us both in without assault and battery."

To my shame and indignation, I was subjected to another critical cross-fire from half drunken eyes. I turned my back and stamped in my vexation; the cabman gave me an approving nod. This little act of mine was so unmistakably genuine, and displayed such very nice embroidery—I do like a tasteful petticoat—that the hard heart of Balaam was softened; at the same moment a brilliant idea stole through his cautious mind.

"Stop now, Balak, put your foot there. She can't push us both in, I believe; leastways not without battery and contempt of court. Now what do you think of this?"—And he whispered to his grimy friend.

"Well, that beats all I ever heer'd on. Let you alone for brains, Balaam, and me for muscle and pluck!"

"Now, young lady," began Balaam in a diplomatic tone, "me and my mate here be in a constitution of trust, or else you may take your oath, and never a pervarication, we never would keep an agreeable young female"—here he gave me two ogles intended for one—"on the flinty stones so long; only we can't say if you mean honest, and there be such a many bad ones going, and we've got a leary file inside. Now listen to what I say. There's a dog as big as a lion in the room as you calls yourn; and he do show his teeth, and no mistake. We be afeared to show our noses there, even at the command of dooty. You can hear him growling now like all the Strand and Fleet Street; and my mate Balak here leave half his breeches behind him, saving your presence, Miss, and lucky to get off so. Now if so be you undertakes, honour bright, to march straight into that front room, my mate and self have concluded to let you in."

"Of course I will," said I, smiling at their terrors. So I paid the cabman, took up my little bag, and ran

right up the stairs. Balaam and Balak feared to come round the corner. "You must unlock the door, Miss," cried one of them, "we was forced to lock him in."

"Oh Judy, my darling Judy, my own pet love of a Judy." He let me say no more; his paws were on my shoulders, and I was in a shower-bath of kisses. In the ecstasy of my joy, I forgot all about the two men and their mysterious doings, and flung myself down on a chair, while Judy, out of his mind with delight, even tried to sit on my lap. He whinnied, and cried, and laughed, and yelled, and could find no vent for his feelings, until he threw his great head back and told all in a wow-wow, that must have been heard in Oxford Street. A little familiar knock, and Mrs. Shelfer appeared, looking rather better than ever.

"Why, dear Mrs. Shelfer, how glad I am to see you! And you look much younger, I declare!"

"And, Miss, you do look bootiful, bootiful, my good friend! Splendid things,"—I was dressed a little better, but still in sombre colours—"splendid, Miss Vaughan, and how you becomes 'em to be sure! Talk of Miss Idols after that, why it's the Queen to a gipsy! And

pray, Miss, if I may make so bold, what did you give for this? it beats my sarcenet dress, I do believe."

"Nothing, Mrs. Shelfer, only a little kiss."

"Gracious me, Miss, then you've been and got engaged, and to a lord at least. I heard you were come into your great fortune at last; more than all Middlesex they tell me, Regency Park and all! And that poor straight-legged young man, as come here every day to see Judy, and to ask for you."

"Now, Mrs. Shelfer, don't talk nonsense,"—my heart was jumping, but I did not want her to see it. "I only hope you haven't said a word to him about these foolish reports."

"Me, Miss! Do you think I would now?"

"Yes; I know by your face you have. You can't cheat me, Mrs. Shelfer. Never mind, if you have not mentioned my name." It never struck me that Conrad would be frightened at my money.

"No, never, Miss, as I hope to be saved." And she crossed herself, which I had never seen her do.

"Come, Mrs. Shelfer, now; I've got some pretty little trifles for you in this bag."

She jumped with pleasure; she was so fond of

knick-knacks: then she put her fingers on her lips and went to the door and listened. Presently she came back with a mysterious air.

"Pray, Miss, as you are so very kind, excuse my taking the liberty, but would you mind giving Judy the bag in his paws? no fear of them getting it there."

"Why, what on earth is the matter? Why didn't you let me in? Who are those nasty men?"

"Oh, it's nothing, Miss; nothing at all to speak of: only they knocks my sticks so in making the inwentory, and the one they made last time, and the time before, would do every bit as well. But they charges for it, every time, the rogues—and they dare to put the chairs down lackered and American cloth, good morocco as ever was, and as if Miss Minto—"

"Now, Mrs. Shelfer, tell me in two words what it means. Is it a sale?"

"No, no, Miss, I should hope not; only an execution, and them two men are the bailiffs; civil tongues enough, and very good judges of porter and periwinkles. They're the ones as come last time; but I'd sooner have the old ones, jolly fellows they were, and knew how to wink both eyes. But that cross-eyed thief—"

"And have they got *my* things, Mrs. Shelfer?"

"No, Miss; only what few was in the bedroom; they daren't come here for Judy. It was as much as their lives were worth. If I had known they was coming, I'd have had him at the front door, but they locked him in as soon as he got a piece out of the other fellow's leg. Bless me, how he did holloa!"

"Do you mean to say, Mrs. Shelfer, that they have taken possession of *my* things in *my* bedroom?"

"To be sure, Miss. I said they was yours, and of course they wouldn't believe me, and the folding door was shut, but Judy would have broken it down only they put the bedstead again it. Gracious me! I never see a dog take on so in all my life! He was like a roaring lion."

"I should rather hope so. Giudice, I commend you; and I've a great mind to let you out, and what is more, I will if they don't give me back my things. Surely, Mrs. Shelfer, they have no right to *my* property."

"Well, so I say, Miss; because it isn't for the landlord; but they won't believe they are yours."

"If they don't believe me pretty soon, Giudice shall

convince them. He is a judge you know, and I've no idea of robbery any more than he has. But who is doing all this, and why do you seem so unconcerned about it? I should cry my eyes out, I am sure."

"Bless your pretty heart, Miss; this makes the fifteenth time I've had them here in the last four years. At first I was terribly put out, and made myself a figure crying; but now I only think it's company, and they drink as if they was, that's certain. You must have seen the inwentories, Miss, round the candles lots of times. Only one thing they does that don't strike me as wery honourable, though it's law I b'lieve; they charges me, and wery high too, for eating up my victuals, and they will have meat four times a day. Why, that Balak, him with his breeches gone—"

"Who put them in, Mrs. Shelfer, and how much is it for?"

"Oh, it's one of Charley's bills or notes, of course. Quinlan holds it, him as keeps "the little dust-pan," down Maiden Lane, and Charley says that all he got for it was ten shillings and a waggon-load of water-cresses. Now they'll be here directly, Miss, with you

to keep the dog in. Excuse me, Miss, I see you have got one of them new wide things as go all round and up—capital things, I must have one before they come again. And could you manage to sit upon the sofa, Miss, and the three best chairs in your petticoat, with the tea-poy on your lap?"

"What on earth do you mean, Mrs. Shelfer?"

"Why, Miss, they can't lay hold of any article in use, I believe, and you have got so much room in your things."

"Do you suppose I intend to let them come here, for a moment? Now let me look at my bedroom. Come, Judy."

"Oh, Miss, they did have such a hunt here for Charley's double-barrel gun; a regular beauty it is, and that big rogue Quinlan is after it. They know it all round this neighbourhood, it was made by a famous maker, Joe something, I b'lieve, and the best he ever made; it was poor Miss Minto's brother's; and they shan't have it, not one of 'em. I'd sooner shoot them with it. I keeps it always in the safest place I knows on, and twice a year I see that it don't get rusty."

"What safe place do you keep it in?"

She put her little mouth up to my ear, and her little hand up to her mouth, and whispered—

"At the broker's, Miss, in Barbican. He has had it now six years. It's in for a quarter its value, but that's all the better for me: I have less to pay for keeping it, and I carries the ticket night and day in my bosom. And do you know, my good friend, they thought they had got it just now; they got a key that fitted that box of yours, that you always locked so carefully, and they made sure that was it; ha, ha, how I laughed at them when they opened it!"

"What! have they dared to open my mahogany box?" It was the repository of my precious relics.

"To be sure they did, Miss, and they found such curious things there! A lovely thing all set with jewels, they said, a baggonet fit for the Duke of Wellington, and plaster shapes like a cobbler's last, and coloured paper with queer letters on it, and a piece of long black hair, and a plan with distances on it—Lor, Miss, what on earth is the matter? Water! water! You're like death—Balaam! Balak!"

"Stop, Mrs. Shelfer!"—I had fallen on the bed—"I would not for ten thousand pounds have had that box exposed to those low ruffians, ransacked, and even catalogued. If I can punish them I will; and you too, you low, miserly, meddling, inquisitive old crone."

She cared for nothing—though afterwards she told me she never saw such eyes in her life—until I luckily called her an "old crone." At that, she fell back upon the towel-horse, and sobbed with both hands over her eyes, as if her heart would break. I had pierced her in the tenderest point—her age.

I did not feel sorry for her at all for at least two minutes, but let her cry away. "Serves her right," I thought. Even if she could not have stopped them from opening that box of mine, at any rate she had no right to gossip about it, and enjoy it all, as she evidently had done. Furthermore, I knew well that she had always been on the tingle to learn the contents of that box, and many a time I had baffled her. Now she had triumphed thoroughly, and I should not have been female if I had calmly allowed it. But seeing her great distress (through all of which she talked, with sobs for affirmations), I began to think what a

pity it was; then to wonder whether she deserved it all; next, to believe that she had done no harm; lastly, to feel that I had been a brute. Thereupon I rushed to coax and kiss her, wiped away her tears with my own lawn handkerchief—the feel of which consoled her, for the edge was lace—and begged her pardon fifty times in a thousand foolish words. Finally she was quite set up again by this:

"I tell you, my dear Patty, when I come to your age, when I am five and thirty"—she was fifty-two at least —"I shall fully deserve to be called an old woman for this; and much older I shall look, there is no doubt, than you do."

"Right, my good friend, you are quite right there"—this expression showed me that she herself was right. —"Why the young man from the butcher's, he said to me this morning, and beautiful black hair reminded me of yours, Miss, all stuck together with the fat from off the kidneys—"

"Come, Mrs. Shelfer, let me see about my box."

"To be sure, to be sure, my dear Miss Vaughan; but what do you think he said? 'Now, William John,' says I, 'a good steak mind, a tender juicy steak, for the

gentleman visitors here'—Balaam, Miss, and Balak, if you please,—'does like good juicy meat.' 'Mrs. Shelfer, ma'am,' he says, a bowing with his tray like that, 'you shall have a steak, ma'am, as fresh and as juicy as yourself.' Now wasn't that pretty, my good friend?"

"Beautiful, Mrs. Shelfer. But see about my box."

"Surely, surely, Miss Vaughan. But it was very pretty, like a valentine, don't you think it was now?"

Where is it?"

"Downstairs, Miss, in my little parlour."

"Then send it up at once, by one of the men."

Presently Balaam came up, looking askance at Judy, and with the mahogany box under his right arm. He touched his dirty hat, for Mrs. Shelfer had filled him by this time with the wonders of my wealth, and then he looked doubtfully, and with sorrow, at his burden.

"Put it here if you please," and I pointed to some chairs, "the dog will not touch you while I am here. Now what is the amount of this execution?"

"Debt fifteen pounds, Miss; expenses up to five o'clock, four pound ten."

"Here is the money. Now give me a receipt."

"No, Miss! You don't mean to pay all!"

"Of course, I do."

"Then, Miss, I beg your pardon, but I can't allow you. I has a duty to my employer, and I has a duty to the public too, not forgetting Mrs. Shelfer, and Charley an old friend, and all so handsome in the way of victuals. And I'm sure she wouldn't wish you to be cheated, Miss. Pay ten pounds for the debt, Miss, and that's a deal more than it cost them or they expects to get. 'Twixt you and me, Miss, every stick of this here furniture is in a dozen bills of sale already; and we comes here more for practice like, than for anything else."

In short, I paid 10*l.* for the debt, and 4*l.* for the expenses: whereupon Balaam looked at me with a most impressive and confidential glance.

"Now, Miss, you won't think me rude; but you have come down so handsome, I can tell you something as you may like to know. I've seed the very moral of that sword of yours before."

"Are you certain? Pray where was it?" I trembled with excitement.

"It was in a place in Somers-town, Miss; where I made a levy, some eight year agone."

"What was the name of the people?"

"Dallyhorse, or Jellycorse, or something of the sort. Foreigners they was, and they had only just come to this country. But I can tell you the name more shipshape from the books. Ah, the very moral of it; only there warn't no serpent."

"Do you know what has become of them?"

"No that I don't, and don't want to come across them again. A mean set of mongrel parlywoos; I got starved amost. But I did hear they was riding the high horse now, and something about court."

"Are you quite sure that the weapon was exactly like this? Look at this again."

"Miss, I can take my oath it was the fellow pea, all but the little snake, and he ain't a fixture, I don't believe. I would have sworn it was the very same, only you tells me not. I noticed it most particular; for I never see one like it, though I have had a sight of foreign weapons in my hands ere now. And the gent had got it put away so; we come across it only through a cat as happened to be confined—"

"And what became of it? Did your employer have it?"

"Not he, Miss. When the gent found we had got it, he was put out and no mistake; though he sham not. Away he goes and gets the money somehow, and has us all away in no time."

"How many were there in the family?"

"Well, let me see. They was only living in lodgings, and had but half the house. There was Dallyhorse himself, and a queer-looking lady, and some children, I don't know how many children, for they kept them out of the way; and a nice young woman as did the cooking for them, and precious little it was."

"What was his profession? And who was his creditor?"

"I don't know. They called him an artist I think, but he look to me more like a sailor. It was a boarding-house bill, as I was on him for. Rum-tempered fellow. I thought he would have stuck me when I got his sword thing. A tallish man he was, slight build, and active, and such black eyes."

"Now, Balaam, if you can trace that man, and find out where he is living now, I will give you two hundred pounds. Here's ten pounds for you as an earnest."

Balaam was so amazed, that he almost looked straight at me.

"Please, Miss, may I tell Balak? I shan't be happy if I doesn't. We always works together, and it wouldn't be on the square like."

"Was he with you then? And can he keep a secret?"

"Yes, Miss, he was with me, and I'd trust him with a gallows secret. I can't do no good without him."

"Then certainly you may tell him; but not while in this house. Here is my country address, that you may know who you act for. Keep clear of the Police. Keep the whole matter to yourselves. In two days, I leave London; if you discover nothing in that time, write to me here, and I will take good care to have the letters forwarded. Do nothing, but find out that one thing, and when I have verified it, I will pay you the two hundred pounds."

"Would you mind, Miss, putting it on paper?"

"Yes: for many reasons, I will not write it down. But you are at liberty to inquire who I am, and whether I am likely to disgrace my word."

After taking his address, "Balaam Levison, Dove

Court, Chancery Lane," I allowed him to depart, and heard him pause on every stair, to ponder this strange matter.

Presently Mr. Shelfer came home, and was delighted to see the bailiffs; and the pleasure being mutual, and my cash burning to be quenched, a most hilarious evening was the natural result. My health was drunk, as I could hear too plainly, to unfathomable depths: and comic songs from three loud organs, provided with patent nasal stops, with even Patty's treble pipe audible in the chorus, broke from time to time the tenour of my sad and lonely thoughts.

CHAPTER IV.

THE bailiff's discovery, and the pursuit commenced thereon, appeared to me so important, that in reply to the message received the next morning—that my uncle was much the same, and longing for my return—I sent word that my journey was put off until the day after the morrow. This allowed me one day more for tidings from my new scouts, as to the success of their efforts. I was very sorry to disappoint my poor sick uncle, but it seemed still worse to run away all in the dark.

The next thing I did was to arrange with Mrs. Shelfer about the money I had paid for her. It was not the money I cared for, but I had other views. Although she was politely thankful, I perceived that she thought it a very bad job indeed, and a most romantic transaction. Thirty per cent. was the very largest dividend she had ever intended to pay. But

the plan which I proposed was so much for her benefit, while it suited me, who otherwise must have lost the money, that it almost recovered her from the shock of having paid a debt. The plan was simply this, that she should reserve my rooms for me, airing and cleaning them duly, and always keeping the bed in a fit state to be slept on at an hour's notice. My previous rent had been twelve shillings a week, the utmost I could afford out of my narrow income; attendance, and linen, and other troubles being now dispensed with, I thought it fair to allow her ten shillings off her debt to me, for every week I should so retain the rooms. The 4*l.* for the expenses of the execution I forgave her altogether; inasmuch as I had paid without consulting her. Directly my payment should be exhausted, to wit in twenty weeks, I would send her a further sum, if I still required the rooms.

She was delighted with this arrangement, which in fact enabled her to have her "sticks" all to herself, to pet them and talk to them every day, and even to clean them, if such a freak of destruction ever should enter her brain. She could use the sitting-

room for her own pleasure and pride, as much as ever she chose, so long as it always was ready for me ; and already visions were passing before her mind's eye, of letting the parlour downstairs with the onion-room for its dormitory. To me the arrangement was very convenient, as affording a fixed and familiar resort in London, and a pivot of ready communication. Nor was it a small consolation to feel that I still retained a stronghold in the neighbourhood of dear friends.

All this being comfortably settled, Giudice and I went forth to pay our visit in Lucas Street. The whole of that street we found so utterly changed in appearance by a vigorous onset of painters, grainers, and decorators, that it was not easy to know the house we were in quest of. Even the numbers on the doors, which had been illegible, or very nearly so, had now been re-arranged and painted over again upon the fashionable and very sensible mode of marking odd numerals on one side, and even ones on the other. Finding myself in a difficulty, and the houses all alike as the central peas of a pod, I trusted to Judy's delicate nose, and rang the bell of

the door at which he halted. Then he drew back, and trembled, and crouched upon the pavement, to wait for my return. As I heard the tinkle, my heart began to flutter: who could tell what new phase of my life might begin with that little pull? After some delay, poor old Cora came, looking as weird and woe-begone as ever—fierce would have been that look to any one but me. I knew that I held her by my magic gordit, like the slave of the lamp. After imploring in some mumbled words (which I interpreted only by knowledge of her desire) gracious leave to kiss that potent charm, she led me into the breakfast-parlour, where I found sweet Isola in a passionate flood of tears.

At sight of me, her beautiful smile broke through them, and her quick deep sobs spent themselves in kisses.

"Oh, I am so gug-gug-glad, my own dear Cla-Cla-Clara; and I won't cuc-cuc-cry one bit more, the moment I can stop."

She put her arms around me, and her head upon my breast, as if I had been, at the very least, her brother.

"My pretty dear, what is it all about?"

I had never seen her look so lovely as now, her violet eyes brimming with liquid brightness, the velvet of her cheeks deepened to rich carmine, and the only thing that sweet face ever wanted, the expression of earnest feeling, now radiant through the whole.

"Why, dear, I ought not to tell you; but I must tell somebody, or my heart will break."

Here she pressed her little hand on that pure unfissured casket, where sorrow was as yet an undreamed-of robber.

"You know, dear, it's all about papa and my darling Conny. The only trouble I ever have, but a very great one, big enough and too big for two little folk of my size. Half an hour ago, I went in suddenly to get a book upon the politico-economical science, the very one papa is lecturing about so beautifully; and I did not even know that Conny was in the house. There papa was, white as death with passion; and Conrad with his eyes like coals of sparkling fire; and what do you suppose my papa called his own son Conny?"

"Don't tell me, if it's anything bad. I can't bear it, Isola."

"Oh, I knew you were fond of him, and I am so glad!"

This she said in such an artless way—as if Conrad and I were two dolls which she meant to put in one doll's house—that instead of colouring, I actually laughed.

"Oh, but I must tell you, Clara: it's right for you to know; one of the leading principles of political economy—"

"Don't talk to me of that stuff."

"Well, I won't; because I see that you don't understand it. But he actually called him—and his voice came from a depth, like an Artesian well—he called our darling Conny—"

"What?" And in my passion, I flung off her hand, and stood up.

"A low bastard, a renegade hound, a scandal to his country—and then he even said Rimbecco."

She pronounced the last word almost with a scream, as an insult beyond forgiveness. What it meant I did not ask, I had heard enough already.

"I must leave this house. Where is your brother Conrad?"

"Gone, I believe, to inquire for you. Nothing but that composes him. I wish he would never come here. And he was ordered not to. But it is about some business. Oh, he never will come again." And she began to cry at the thought of the very thing she had wished for.

"Neither will I come again. Where is your father now?"

"Up at his lumbering cabinet, where he always consoles himself, whenever he is put out. But if you are going, dear child, do let me come with you. I shall cry till I die here, all by myself: and Pappy never cares about me, when he is in his black dudgeon."

In a few minutes we left the rude unpleasant house, and even Judy seemed relieved to get away from the door. By the time we reached Mrs. Shelfer's, Idols was in capital spirits again, and pressed me for some account of the wonderful wealth, and the grand house she had heard of. No doubt this rumour had found its way through Ann Maples.

"And the great Lord—what's his name, dear Donna? I wouldn't believe a word of it; though I'm sure you are a deal too good for all the house of peers. But Conny did; and wasn't he in a way? But he ought to be very glad you know—wish you every blessing, as they say in the plays; and a peer is the very highest blessing to an Englishwoman. But one thing I am quite resolved on: Judy belongs to me now, don't you, lovely Judy?"

"No," said the judicious, "I belong to Clara."

"Though Conny pretends, since he was left at your place, that he belongs to him. Now I will give him to you; and so will Conny too. You can afford to keep him now, and I can't, he does eat such a lot; and he does not care a pin for me, but he loves you with all his heart."

"How do you know he does?" I was not attending much, but thinking of some one else.

"Why, can't you see that he does, how he wags his tail every time you even look at him? But I hope poor Conny is here. I should think he would stop, when he finds *darling Clara* come back."

I had jumped to that hope long ago, before we even

left Lucas Street, and that had something to do with my walking so fast.

No, he was not there, he had not been there to-day. It was my turn now to cry; what might he not have done, after that fearful insult, and from his own father too?

The tears, which I confided to no one except the wooden-legged blackbird—for Giudice would have made such a fuss about them—were still upon my cheeks, when I heard the well-known step—not half so elastic as usual. I fled into my bedroom, and pushed the boxes about, to make a goodly noise, and to account for the colour in my face. Then out I came at the side-door, and ran downstairs perversely, though I knew that Conrad and Isola were in my sitting-room.

But this first-rate manœuvre only outwitted its author, for Isola ran down after me, and sent me upstairs alone. All my little nonsense vanished the moment I looked in Conrad's face. His healthy brown complexion was faded to an opal white; beneath his eyes such dark blue rims, that I thought he had spectacles on; and on either cheek a round red spot was burning. So shocked I was, that when he took

my hand, I turned my face away and smothered down a sob. I felt that I had no right to be so fresh and blooming. Nor was it only in health that the contrast between us lay. I was dressed with unusual care, having fidgeted all the morning, and with my utmost taste. Poor Conrad was in his working clothes, full of marble dust, tumbled, threadbare, and even in need of mending; his hair swept anyhow, and his hands not over-lately washed. Yet, for all that, he was as clearly a gentleman, as I was a lady.

Not so would he have been arrayed, I fancy, had he thought to see neat Clara. And yet, who knows? "I trust that you will excuse me," he began to say, "but such things have happened lately—you will not account me rude—I had no sense at all of this great pleasure."

"I fear you have not been very happy." I knew not what to say, or how to keep my voice clear.

"Yes," he replied, "as happy as I deserve. It serves me aright for esteeming so much of myself, before that I do anything. But I will win my way"—and his own proud glance flashed out—"and we shall see how many will scorn me then."

"No one in the world can scorn you," I said very softly, and my voice thrilled through him.

"Ah, you are always kind and gentle:"—am I though, thought I—"but I will no more fatigue you with my different lot in life. I am told that some great nobleman has won you for his own. Perhaps you will give me an order."

His throat was swelling with these bitter words, and he looked at his dusty clothes. Somewhat rude I thought him, but I knew not half his troubles.

"Whoever told you that, has made a great mistake. I am engaged to no one. Your sister knows me better." And I turned away to the window. For a minute he said nothing; but I could hear his heart beat. Stedfastly I looked at the cheesemonger's shop. Oh for a flower, or something on the balcony!

Presently he came round the corner of the sofa. Without being rude, I could not help turning round.

His face was much, much, brighter, and his eyes more kind.

"Have I said any harm—I would not for the world—I knew not it was harm."

"No harm," I said, "to think so ill of me! To be-

lieve, for a single moment, that because I am not so poor, I would go and forsake—at least, I mean, forget—any one I cared for!"

"Can I ever hope, if I serve you all my life, that you will ever care for me?"

"Don't you know I do?" And I burst into my violent flood.

When I came to myself, both his arms were round me, and I was looking up at his poor sick face, my hair quite full of marble chips, and he was telling me with glad tears in his eyes, which he never took from mine, how he cared for nothing now, not for all the world, not for glory or for shame, so long as I only loved him.

"With all my heart and soul," I whispered, "him and no one else whatever, whether in life or death."

All the folly we went through I am not going to repeat, though I remember well every atom of it. Let the wise their wisdom keep, we are babes and sucklings. Neither of us had ever loved before, or ever meant to love again, except of course each other, and that should be for ever.

"One thing I must tell you, my own sweet love, and

yet I fear to do it. But you are not like other girls. There is no one like you, nor has there ever been. I think you will not scorn me for another's fault."

"Of course I won't, my own pet Conny. What is this awful thing?"

"I am an illegitimate son."

One moment I sprang from him; the next I despised myself. But in spite of all my troubles, there still lurked in my heart the narrow pride of birth. Down to the earth it fell beneath the foot of true love, and I kissed away from his eyes the mingled reproach and sorrow, assuring him that at least he should have a legitimate wife.

To make amends, I leaned upon him one moment, and put my hand on his shoulder, and let him play awhile with the dark shower of my hair.

"Darling Conny, you have told me yours, now you shall hear *my* secret. Only promise me you will give tit for tat. You say you loved me ever since you saw me first; then you must have loved your Clara when you saved her life."

"What do you mean, my Clara? Those low ruffians in the Park were not going to kill you."

"No, dearest; I don't mean that at all. But there's a kiss for that, I have owed it you ever since. But what I mean no kisses can repay; no, nor a life of love. You saved a life worth fifty of my own."

Some dark alarm was growing in his eyes, on which I gazed with vague increasing terror.

"Why, dearest, it is nothing. Only your own Clara is not Clara Valence; you must call her 'Clara Vaughan.'"

With actual violence he thrust me from his arms, and stood staring at me, while I trembled from head to foot; his face was one scarlet flame.

"And pray, Sir, what harm have I done? Am I to suppose that *you*"—special emphasis meant for illegitimacy—"that *you* are ashamed of my father and me?"

"Yes, I am. Accursed low licentious race! If you knew what you have done, you would tear your heart out rather than give it to me."

"Thank you—I feel obliged—my heart indeed—to a bastard. Take back your ring if you please; kindly restore me mine. May I trouble you for room enough to go by?"

And I swept out of the room, and through the side-door into my bed-room, where I crouched in a corner, with both hands on my heart, and the whole world gone away. "Mad!" I heard him cry, "yes, I must go mad at last!" Away he rushed from the house, and I fell upon the bed, and lay in fits till midnight.

CHAPTER V.

I BELIEVE that my heart would have burst, if they had not cut my stays; and how I wished it had. When I came back to my unlucky self, there was something shivery cold in the forehead wave of my hair. Was it Conrad's finger? I put up my hand to dash it away, and caught a fine fat leech. Dr. Franks was sitting by me, holding a basin and a sponge.

"That's the last of them, my dear child. Don't disturb him. He is doing his duty by you."

"His duty! Was it his duty to say such fearful things? To break my heart with every word! Ashamed of me—ashamed of my darling father! Low and licentious! What have I done? what have I done? Oh, if I only knew what harm I have ever done!"

"No harm, my poor dear, no harm in the world; let me bathe your pretty face. Come now, you shan't cry another drop. What is to become of the beautiful eyes I was so proud of saving?"

"Oh, I wish you hadn't, how I wish you hadn't. Dr. Franks, I have no father, and no mother, and no one in all the world to love me, and I was just getting so nice and happy again, so proud of myself, and so much prouder of him, and I began to think how glad my own dear father would be; and, Dr. Franks, I did love him so, with all my heart, perhaps it's not very large, but with every morsel and atom of my heart—and now, now I must hate him as much as ever I can. Oh let me go home, do let me go home, where my father and mother are buried." And I rose in the bed to start, and the candles glimmered in my eyes.

"Please to go out of the room, every one please to go; and don't let Isola come. I can't bear the sight of her now. It won't take me long to dress, and I don't want any luggage; and, Mrs. Shelfer, please to go for a cab: and I shan't want the rooms any more, and it does not matter a bit about any letters. I'll tell my father everything when I see him, and then perhaps he'll tell me what harm it is I have done. Why don't you go, when you see I want to get up?"

"Don't you see, my dear child, we are going? Only you must take this glass of wine first, to prepare you for

your long journey. Will you take it now, while we fetch the cab?"

"Yes, anything, anything: I don't care what it is. Only let me get ready."

And I drank, without even tasting it, a glass of some dark liquid, which saved me from wandering further either in mind or body.

When I awoke, it was broad noon once more, and Dr. Franks was sitting by me with one of my hands in his. "Magnificent constitution," I thought I heard him mutter, "glorious constitution." What good was it to me? At the foot of the bed, sat Isola crying terribly. Slowly I remembered all my great disaster, but saw it only through a dull gray veil. The power of the opiate was still upon my brain. But a cold dead pain lay heavy on my heart, and always seemed to want a heavy hand upon it. After he had given me a reviving draught, Dr. Franks perceived that I wished to speak to Isola, and accordingly withdrew.

Poor Isola came slowly and sat beside my pillow, doubting whether she should dare to take my hand. Therefore I took hers, drew her face towards me, and covered it with kisses. Isola had done no harm to

me whatever, and I felt it something to have even her to love. She was overcome with affectionate surprise.

"Oh, Clara dearest, I am so very glad to find you love me still. I feared that you would never care for me again. What is it all about, dear, if you are well enough to tell me, what is all this dreadful misery about?"

"That is the very thing I want to learn from you, dear. Surely you must know better far than I do."

I would not even ask her what had become of Conrad.

"No, I don't dear. I don't know at all. All I know is there must have been some dreadful quarrel between you and Conrad. I must tell you, dear, I was so anxious about something you can guess, that I stole up to the door soon after he came in; and you were so intent upon the window, that you never even saw me put the door ajar; and then I heard him tell you how very much he loved you, and I was so glad. And then I thought it was not quite fair of me, and I knew all I wanted, so I ran downstairs again. And the next thing I heard was your bedroom door bang,

and then Conny dashed out the house, and Judy came down to me looking very sorrowful. And I ran up to you, and here I found you shrieking so, and rolling, and clutching at the bedclothes, and I was so frightened I could not even move. And then Judy came and made such a dreadful howling, and Mrs. Shelfer ran straight off for the doctor, and I poured the water in the decanter over you, and I can't tell any more."

"But surely, darling, you have been home since that?"

"Oh yes; when Dr. Franks came, and you were a little better, he would make me go home, because he did not want two patients, he said; and his eldest daughter, such a nice girl, came with me; and my papa didn't even know that I had been out of the house. He was still upstairs, brooding over his relics, and all the sixth form at the College had to go to dinner without their lectures; but I do believe the stupid girls were glad."

"And did you hear—no, it doesn't matter."

"No, I never heard what became of Conrad. No doubt he went back to his favourite chip, chipping. He has got a splendid thing he is full of now, and

it prevents his sleeping; something or other very horrible from Dante, and the leading figure is modelled after you. I have seen the drawings, and he has got you exactly."

"How gratifying to be sure! I will ask you no more questions. Pray let me know when I am for sale; though I should call it a work of *illegitimate* art."

My eyes were on her face, but she showed no consciousness whatever, which she must have done had she known the fact referred to, for she was quick of perception, and open as the day. I was angry with myself for the low and bootless sneer, which was pretty certain to be conveyed to her brother.

"Now I will delay no longer. Let me speak to Dr. Franks. I shall go this afternoon."

Poor Isola turned pale; she had looked upon the occurrence as only a lover's quarrel, sure to be set right in a day or two. She could not harbour any great resentment long, and forgot that I could.

"Don't talk so, dear; and you so very weak! it would be sure to kill you. And what will Conny think? You must not go, at any rate, till you have been to see him."

"I go to him! I hope to see him never more until I charge him in another world with this bitter wrong. No, no more if you please; I will not hear his name again. How can he be your brother? Darling Idols, I never shall forget you. Take this, my pet, and think of me sometimes, for you will never see me more."

I gave her an emerald ring, set with lovely pearls, small types of herself. It was not the one I had reclaimed from her brother, that was a plain keeper.

"Oh Clara, Clara, don't say that, whatever you do, because I know you will keep to it, you are so shamefully obstinate. And I never loved any one in the world like you; no, not even Conny."

"And not even your father or mother?"

"No, not half so much. I like Pappy very well when he is good and kind, but that is not very often now"—the poor little thing's eyes filled again with tears,—"and as for my mother, I never even saw her; she died when I was born."

"And I love you too, my sweet, best of all the world—now. Nevertheless, we must part."

"And never see each other? I don't call that

loving. Tell me why: do tell me why. There seems some horrid mystery about every one I love."

And she was overcome with grief. She had not been, like me, apprenticed young to trouble.

"Darling, I will write to you sometimes. You can come here for the letters. I will have no secrets any more from you; but you must never attempt to write to me—only send your name on a bit of paper when my letters go."

"But why on earth mayn't I write to you, Clara dear?"

"I can't tell you why. Only I cannot bear it." The truth was I could never have borne to read about her brother. So all that was settled, and I said good-bye with plenty of bitter crying. As for Balaam and Balak, from whom I expected tidings, and George Cutting, whom I had thought it right to send for—I had not the heart to attend to any of them. Dr. Franks had done his utmost to oppose my sudden journey, but I told him truly that I should go mad if I stopped there any longer. I could not bear the mere sight of the room where I had been, in the height of delicious joy, so trampled upon and outraged. My brain

was burning, and my heart was aching for the only spot on earth where true love could be found, the spot where lay my father and my mother.

Seeing how the fever of the mind was kindling, the doctor, like a good physician, knew that the best plan was to indulge, and so allay it. Yet he begged me, if I had any regard for him, not to travel all alone while in that dangerous state. With most unlooked-for and unmerited kindness, he even sent his eldest daughter, at an hour's notice, to see me home in safety.

The last farewell was said to Judy, whom I would not take away, greatly as I loved him still; and he received most stringent orders first to conduct dear Isola home, and then to go to his old quarters at the livery stables. Apparently he acquiesced, though with wistful glances; but at Paddington, as I was getting the tickets, to my amazement in he rushed, upset a couple of porters, and demanded his ticket too. Under the circumstances there was nothing for it, except to let him go with us, or to lose the train. So his ticket was taken, and he dashed into the dog-box with an enthusiasm which earned him a hard knock on the head.

CHAPTER VI.

Annie Franks was exactly as Isola had described her, "such a nice girl." Kind-hearted like her father, truthful, ladylike, and sensitive; retiring too, and humble-minded, with a well of mute romance in the shadow of her heart, a wave of which she would not for the world display. The only vent she ever allowed this most expansive element was novel-reading, or a little quiet hero-worship. Her greatest happiness was to sit upon a lonely bank, and read a slashing curtel-axe and gramercy romance, with lots of high-born ladies in it, and lots of moonlight love. If history got hard thumps among them, and chronology, like an unwound clock, was right but twice in twenty-four, simple Annie smiled no less, so long as the summer sun flashed duly on pennon, helm, and gonfalon, and she could see bright cavalcades winding through the greenwood shade. In "coat and waistcoat" novels

her soul took no delight. Not a shilling would she squeeze from her little beaded purse for all the quicksilver of Dickens, or the frosted gold* of Thackeray. Yet she was not by any means what fast young ladies call a "spooney;" she had plenty of common sense upon the things of daily life, plenty of general information, and no lack of gentle self-respect.

Now she was wending through an upland meet for gray-clad reverie, where she might dream for days and days, and none but silly deer intrude. As we passed along in the gloaming of the May, through bosomed lawn and bosky dell, with lilac plumes for cavaliers, and hawthorn sweeps for ladies' trains, the soft gray eyes of Annie ceased at last to watch me, and her thoughts were in costume of Chevy Chase or Crecy.

By reason of the message sent the day before, no one in the house expected me; so we stole in quietly,

* "Ice-tempered steel" I had written. But alas, the great author is dead, and they say that his kind heart was grieved by nothing so much as the charge of Cynicism. If he were a Cynic, would that we all were dogs!

—"Κυνὸς ὄμματ' ἔχων, καρδίην δ' ἐλάφοιο."

C. V. 1864.

lest my uncle should be alarmed, and I requested Gregory, tipsy Bob's successor, to bring Jane to meet us, in my own little room. Annie being installed there, to her great delight, and allowed free boot of "Marry, Sir knight," and "Now by my halidame," I went to see my poor dear uncle, who by this time was prepared for my visit. Very weak he seemed, and nervous, and more rejoiced at my return than even I had expected. To me also it was warm comfort in my cold pride-ailment to be with one of my own kin, whom none could well disparage. There was a dignity about him, an air of lofty birth, which my own darling father had been too genial to support. Soon I perceived from my uncle's manner, that something had happened since my departure to add to his uneasiness. But he offered no explanation and I did not like to ask him. He in turn perceived the heavy dark despondency, which, in spite of all my efforts, would at times betray itself. Pride and indignation supported me, when I began to think, but then I could not always think, whereas I could always feel. Moreover, pride and indignation are, in almost every case, props that carry barbs. In a word, though I would scorn the

love-lorn maiden's part, it was sad for me to know that I could never love again.

With a father's tenderness, he feebly drew my head to his trembling breast, and asked me in a tearful whisper what had happened to me. But I was too proud to tell him. Oh that I had not been! What misery might have been spared to many. But all the time my head lay there, I was on fire with shame and agony, thinking of the breast on which my hair had last been shed.

"Now, good nurse Clara," he said at last with a poor attempt at playfulness, "I shall have no more confidence in your professional skill, unless you wheel me forth to-morrow with a cheerful face. You are tired to-night, my love, and so should I have been, if you had not come home. To-morrow you shall tell me why you came so suddenly and saved me a day of longing. And to-morrow, if I am strong enough, I will tell you a little history, which may be lost, like many a great one, unless it is quickly told. Stop—one cup of tea, dear, and how proud I am to pour it out for you—and then I will not keep you from a livelier friend. To-morrow, you must introduce me. I still like pretty girls, and

you should have brought that lovely Isola with you. I can't think why you didn't. She would have been most welcome."

"Come, uncle, I shall be jealous. The young lady I have brought is quite pretty enough for you."

He sighed at some remembrance, and then asked abruptly,

"Do you mean to sleep, my darling, in the little room to-night?" His voice shook so, while he asked this question, that I was quite certain something had alarmed him. The little room was the one I had occupied between the main corridor and his present bedroom. It was meant for an ante-room, not a sleeping chamber; but I had brought my little iron bedstead thither.

"To be sure I do, dear uncle; do you suppose, because I have been off duty, that I mean to be cashiered? Only one thing I must tell you; I have brought home with me one of the very best friends I ever had. You have heard me talk of Giudice. I cannot bear the thought of parting with him to-night, he will cry so dreadfully in the strange stables; and in London he always slept on the mat outside my door.

May I have him in the lobby, uncle, you will never hear him move, and he never snores except just after dinner?"

"To be sure, my pet; I would not part you for the world. God bless you, my own child, and keep your true heart lighter."

If I had been really his own child, he could not have been more loving to me, than he had now become.

After giving Annie Franks her tea, which she was far too deep in tournament to drink, I paid a visit to Mrs. Fletcher's room, and learned from her that nothing, so far as she knew, had happened to disturb my uncle: Mrs. Daldy had not been near the house, and there was a rumour afloat that she had been called to take part in a revival meeting near Swansea. So after introducing Judy, who was a dreadful dog for jam, and having him admired almost as much as he ought to be, I returned to Annie, and found her in high delight with everything and everybody, and most of all with her tapestry-writer. Leaving her at last under Tilly's care, Judy and I were making off for our sleeping quarters, when truant Matilda followed me down the passage hastily.

"Oh, Miss, please, Miss, I want to tell you something,

and I did not like to name it before that nice young lady, because I am sure she is timid like."

Matilda looked not timid like, but terrified exceedingly, as she stared on every side with her candle guttering.

"Hold your candle up, Matilda; and tell me what it is."

By this time we were in the main passage, "corridor" they called it, and could see all down it by the faint light of some oil-lamps, to the oriel window at the farther end, whereon the moon (now nearly full again) was shining.

"Why, Miss, the ghost was walking last night, and the night before."

"Nonsense, Matilda. Don't be so absurd."

"It's true, Miss. True as you stand there. Pale gray it is this time, and so tall, and the face as white as ashes." And a shiver ran through Tilly, at her own description—"You know, Miss, it's the time of year, and she always walks three nights together, from the big east window to this end and back again. So please to lock your door, Miss, and bolt it too inside."

"Well done, Tilly! Does any one intend to wait up for the ghost? What time does it come?"

"One o'clock, Miss, as punctual as a time-piece. But could you suppose, Miss, any one would dare to wait up and see it?"

"Then how have they seen it, in the name of folly?"

"Why, Miss, I'll tell you. One of the carriage-horses got an inflammation in his eyes, and the farrier give orders to have it sponged never more than three hours between, and so William Edwards, the head-groom if you please, Miss"—Tilly curtseyed here, because this was her legitimate sweetheart—"he stops up till one o'clock to see to it, and then Job Leyson goes instead. So William come in, Miss, on Monday night, to go to bed, please, Miss, and he took the short cut, not that he were allowed, Miss, or would think of taking a liberty on no account whatever, but he were that sleepy he didn't know the way to bed, so he went across the corridor for the short cut from the kitchen gallery to the servants' passage; and there he saw—he hadn't any light, Miss, and the lamps all out—Goodness me! Whatever was that? Did you hear it, Miss?"

"Yes, and see it, Tilly; it's a daddy in your candle.

Go on, Tilly, will you. Am I to stop here all night and get as bad as you are?"

"There William Edwards, a man who never swears or drinks, there he saw all in the dark, coming so stately down the corridor, as if it hadn't room enough, with one arm up like this, a tall pale melancholy ghost, and he knew it was the lady who was wronged and killed, when the great wars was, Miss, two hundred year agone."

"Well, Tilly, and did he speak to it?"

"He was that frightened, Miss, he could not move or speak; but he fell again the wall in the side-passage, with his eyes coming out of his head, and his hair up like my wicker-broom. And then she vanished away, and he got to bed, and did perspire so, they was forced to wring the blankets."

"Capital, Tilly! And who saw her the next night?"

"Why that nincompoop Job Leyson, Miss. Our William was a deal too wise to go that way any more, but he tell Job Leyson, and he a foolish empty fellow, perhaps you know, Miss. 'Ho,' says Job, 'I often hear tell of her, to-night I'll have a peep.' So last night when William went to bed on the

servants' side, down comes Job and takes the front way, pretty impudent of him I think. And, Miss, I don't know what he see, I never says much to him; but there they found him in the saddle-room, at five o'clock this morning, with his heels up on a rack, and his head down in the bucket, and never a bit of sponge had come near the poor mare's eye."

"Oh, thank you, Tilly. Perhaps you had better snuff your candle. No ghost will have much chance that comes near my Judy." And with that I went to bed, tired of such nonsense.

An hour of deep sleep from pure weariness both of mind and body, and I awoke with every fibre full of nervous life. The moon was high in the south-east, and three narrow stripes of lozenged light fell upon the old oak floor. Although my uncle had left the gable where the windows faced the setting sun, he still kept to the western wing. The house, which was built in the reign of Henry the Eighth, covered the site and in some parts embodied the relics of a much more ancient structure. The plan was very simple, at least as regarded the upstair rooms. From east to west ran one long corridor, crossed at right angles, in the centre and

near the ends, by three gable passages. Although there were so many servants, not half the rooms were occupied: all the best bedrooms had been empty many a year. No festivities had filled them since my father's days. Gloom and terror still hung over the eastern part, where he had been so foully murdered. In most of the downstair windows along the front of the house, the rickety lattice of diamond panes had been replaced by clear plate-glass, but the old hall, and the corridor, and some of the gable windows still retained their gorgeous tints and heraldry.

As the shadows of the mullions stole upon my counterpane, there began to creep across my mind uneasy inklings of the ghost. A less imaginative man than William Edwards, I who had often enjoyed his escort, knew well there could not be. As for Job Leyson I could not tell with what creative powers his mind might be endowed; but—to judge from physiognomy—a light ring snaffle would hold them.

Thinking, with less and less complacence, of this apparition story, and the red legend which lay beneath it, for the spectral lady was believed to be a certain Beatrice Vaughan, daughter of the Cavalier who per-

ceived the moss-light, and heiress of the house 200 years ago—thinking of this, I say, with more and more of flutter, I sat up in the bed and listened. My uncle's thick irregular breathing, the play of an ivy-leaf on the mullion, the half-hour struck by the turret-clock, were all the sounds I heard; except that my heart, so listless and desponding, was re-asserting some right to throb for its own safety. With my hand upon it, I listened for another minute, resolving if I heard nothing more to make a great nest in the pillows—I always want three at least—and shut both ears to destiny. But there came, before the minute passed, a low, long, hollow sound, an echo of trembling expectation. In a moment I leaped from the bed; though I had never heard it before, I knew it could only be the bloodhound's cautious warning.

I flung a long cloak round me, gathered close my hair, hurried velvet slippers on, locked my uncle in, and quietly opened the outer door. There stood Giudice in the moonlight, with his head towards the far east window, his ears laid back, his crest erect, and in his throat a gurgling sound, a growl suppressed by wonder. He never turned to look at me, nor even wagged his

tail, but watched and waited grimly. I laid my hand upon him, and then glided down the corridor, avoiding the moonlight patches. Giudice followed, like my shadow, never a foot behind me, his tread as stealthy as a cat's. Before I reached the oriel window where the broad light fell, something told me to draw aside and watch. I withdrew, and Giudice with me, into the dark entrance to my father's room. Here we would see what came. Scarcely had I been there ten throbs of the heart, when between me and the central light, where the moonbeams fell askance, rose a tall gray figure. I am not quite a coward, for a woman at least, but every drop of blood within me at that sight stood still. Even Giudice trembled, and his growl was hushed, and every hair upon him bristled as he crouched into my cloak. Slowly the form was rising, like a corpse raised from a coffin by the loose end of the winding-sheet. I could not speak, I could not move, much less could I think. With a silent stately walk, or glide—for no feet could I see—the figure came towards the embrasure where we lurked. Ashy white the face was, large the eyes and hollow, all the hair fell down the back, the form was tall and graceful, one arm

was lifted as in appeal to heaven, and the shroud drooped from it, the other lay across the breast. The colour of the shroud was gray, pale, unearthly gray. For one moment as it passed, I kept my teeth from chattering. Giudice crawled one step before me, with his mind made up for death. Back the blood leaped to my heart, as the apparition glided slowly down the corridor without sigh or footfall.

What to do I knew not; my feet were now unrooted from the ground. Should I fly into my father's death-room? No; I was afraid. To stay where I was seemed best, but how could I see it come back, as I knew it would? Another such suspension of my life, and all, I felt, would be over.

Suddenly, while still the figure was receding in the distance, I saw a great change in the bloodhound. He strode into the corridor, and began to follow. At the same time, the deep gurgle in his throat revived. In a moment, it flashed through me that he had smelt the ghost to be a thing of flesh and blood. It might be my father's murderer. At any rate it had entered as he must have done. Close behind the dog I stole after the spectral figure. The supernatural horror fled;

all my life was in my veins. What became of me I cared not, I who was so wretched. Almost to the end, that gliding form preceded us, then turned down a flight of steps leading to the basement. Triple resolution gushed through me at this; this was the spot where the ghost was known to turn, and glide back through the corridor. When it had descended about half-way down the staircase, where the steps were on the turn and narrow, standing at the head I distinctly heard a flop, as of a slipper-heel dropping from the foot, and then caught up again. What ghost was likely to want slippers? And what mortal presence need I fear, with Judy at my side? Keeping him behind me by a gentle touch, I hurried down the stairs. Luckily, I stopped before I turned the corner, for a gleam came up the passage; the ghost had struck a lucifer.

It was a dark and narrow passage, proof to any moon-light, and the spectre lost no time in lighting a small lamp, to find the study door; I mean my uncle's private study, where he kept his papers. The lamp was of peculiar shape, very small, and fitted with three reflectors, to throw the light in converging planes.

Still remaining in deep shadow, I saw the person—

ghost no longer—produce a key, open the study door and enter. Then an attempt was made to lock the door from the inside, but—as I knew by the sound—the false key would not work that way, and the door was only closed. Whispering into Judy's ear, that if he dared to move—for his honest wrath at these burglarious doings could scarcely be controlled—I would make a ghost of him next day, I left him in the passage, and softly followed the intruder. First I looked through the key-hole; the room was very dark and full of heavy furniture; I could see nothing; but must risk the chance. So I slipped in noiselessly and closed the door behind me. With the ghostly apparel thrown aside, and a mask laid on an ebony desk, stood intently occupied at the large bureau, which I had once so longed to search, my arch-enemy, Mrs. Daldy. I was not at all surprised, having felt long since that it could be no other. Sitting upon a stiff-backed velvet chair, in the shadow of an oaken book-case—crouch I would not for her—I waited to see what she would do. Already the folding-doors of the large bureau were open; their creaking had drowned the noise of my entry. Before her was exposed a

multitude of drawers. All the visible doors she had probably explored on the previous nights, as well as the other repositories of various kinds which the room contained. Her search was narrowed now to one particular part of this bureau.

The folding-doors were very large, and richly inlaid with arabesques and scroll-work of satin-wood and ebony: all the inside was fitted and adorned with ivory pillars, small alcoves containing baby mirrors, flights of chequered steps, and other quaint devices, besides the more business-like and useful sliding trays. With the lamp-light flashing on it, it looked like a palace for the Queen of Dolls—a place for puppet ceremony and pleasure. Every drawer was faced with marquetrie, every little door had panels of shagreen. In short, the whole thing would have been the pride of any shop in Wardour Street, when that street was itself. Having never seen it open till now, I was quite astonished, though I don't know how often my father had promised to show it to me on my very next birthday, if I were good. Probably I was never good enough.

Without any hesitation, Mrs. Daldy pressed a fan, or slide, of cedar-wood, in the right corner of the

cabinet; the slide sunk into a groove, and disclosed two deep, but narrow drawers; these she pulled out from their boxes, and laid aside; they were full of papers, which she no doubt had already examined. Then she placed the diminutive lamp on one of the doll steps, and produced from her pocket three or four little tools. Before commencing with these, she probed and pressed the partition between the sockets of those two drawers, in every imaginable way—a last attempt to find the countersign of some private nook, which had defied her the night before.

At length, with a low cry of impatience, she seized a small, thin chisel, and a bottle of clear liquid: with the one she softened the buhl veneer upon the partition's face, and with the other she removed it. Then, after a little unscrewing, she carefully prized away the stop of cedar-wood, while I admired her workmanlike proceedings (so far as they were visible to me), and the graceful action of the arms she was so proud of. Her shoulder came rather in my way, but I got a glimpse of the narrow, vertical opening, where the cedar-stop had been. She drew a long breath of delight and pride, then thrust a wire-crook into this opening,

and hooked forth two thin and closely-fastened packets. Eagerly she looked at them; they were what she wanted. No doubt she knew their contents; her object was to get hold of them. Having placed them carefully in her bosom, she prepared for a little more joiner's work, to restore what she had dismantled. Her dexterity was so pleasing, that I let her proceed for a while. She soon refixed the cedar-stop, tapping it in the most knowing way with the handle of the screw-driver, then she screwed it tightly, and spread the wood with some liquid cement to carry the veneer. She had mislaid the narrow strip of tortoise-shell and brass, and was looking for it on the chequered steps, when I called aloud:

"Shall I show you where you put it, Mrs. Daldy? But where on earth did you learn your trade?"

Never was amazement written more strongly on any human face. If the ghost had frightened me, I now had my full revenge. She dropped the bottle of cement, and it rolled on the cabinet steps; she turned, with her face as white as the mask, and glared round the room, for I was still concealed in the recess. I thought she would have blown out the lamp, but she had not

presence of mind enough: otherwise among all that furniture it would not have been easy to catch her; and she knew nothing of my sentinel at the door.

After some quiet enjoyment of her terror, I came forth, and met her fairly.

"What, Clara Vaughan! Is it possible? I thought you were in London."

"Is it possible that I have found a Christian, so truly earnest about her soul, so yearning over the unregenerate, committing a black robbery in the dead of night? Is this what you call a wholesome conviction of sin?"

Low exultation I confess: but the highest blood in the land, if it were blood, could scarcely have forborne it: for how I abhorred that hypocrite!

For a time she knew not what to do or say, but glared at me without much Christian feeling. Then she tried to carry it off in a grandly superior style. She drew herself up, and looked as if I were not worth reasoning with.

"Perhaps you are young enough to imagine, that because appearances are at this moment peculiar—"

"Thank you: there is no need to inquire into the

state of my mind. Be kind enough to restore those packets which you have stolen."

"Indeed! I am perfectly amazed at your audacity. What I have belongs to me righteously, and a stronger hand than yours is required to rob me." She grasped her chisel, and stood in a menacing attitude. I answered her very quietly, and without approaching nearer.

"If I wish to see you torn in pieces, I have only to raise my hand. Giudice!" And I gave a peculiar whistle thoroughly known to my dog. He leaped against the door, forced the worn catch from the guard, and stood at my side, with his great eyes flashing and his fangs laid bare. Mrs. Daldy jumped to the other side of the table, and seized a heavy chair.

"My dear child, my dear girl, I believe you are right after all. It is so hard to judge—for God's sake keep him back—so hard to judge when one's own rights are in question. The old unregenerate tendencies—"

"Will lodge you in Gloucester jail to-morrow. Once more those papers—or—" and I looked at Giudice and began to raise my hand. His eyes were

on it, and he gathered himself for the spring like a cannon recoiling. In the height of her terror, she tore her dress open and flung me the packets across the end of the table. I examined and fixed them to Judy's collar. Then we both advanced, and penned her up in a corner. It was so delightful to see her for once in her native meanness, despoiled of her cant and phylactery, like a Pharisee under an oil-press. She fell on her knees and implored me, in plain earnest English for once, to let her go. She appealed to my self-interest, and offered me partnership in her schemes; whereby alone I could regain the birthright of which I had been so heinously robbed. I only asked if she could reveal the mystery of my father's death. She could not tell me anything, or she would have jumped at the chance. At last I promised to let her go, if she would show me the secret entrance under the oriel window. It was not for her own sake I released her, but to avoid the scandal and painful excitement which her trial must have created. When she departed, now thoroughly crestfallen, I followed her out of the house by the secret passage, wherein she had stored a few of her

stage-properties. Giudice, whom, for fear of treachery, I kept at my side all the time, showed his great teeth in the moonlight, and almost challenged my right to let her go. After taking the packets from him, I gave him a sheepskin mat under the window there, and left him on guard; although there was little chance of another attempt being made, while the papers were in my keeping. Her mask and spectral drapery remained with me, as trophies of this my ghostly adventure.

CHAPTER VII.

NEXT day when I showed my uncle the two sealed packets which I had rescued, and told him all that had happened, at first he was overcome with terror and amazement. His illness seemed to have banished all his satirical humour, and that disdainful apathy which is the negative form of philosophy. He took the parcels with a trembling hand, and began to examine the seals.

"All safe," he said at last, "all safe, to my surprise. Dear child, I owe you more than life this time. You have defeated my worst enemy. To your care only will I commit these papers, one of which, I hope will soon be of little value. It is my will; and by it your father's estates are restored to you, while the money which I have saved by my own care and frugality is divided into two portions, one for you, and the other, upon certain events, for that worthless

Mrs. Daldy. This must be altered at once. When you have heard my story, you may read the will, if you like. Indeed I wish you to do so, because it will prove that in spite of all our estrangement, I have meant all along to act justly towards you. But that you may understand things properly, I will tell you my strange history. Only one thing you must promise before I begin."

"What is it, uncle dear?"

"That you will forgive me for my one great error. Although it was the cause of your dear father's death."

I could not answer, for a minute. Then I took his hand and kissed it, as he turned his face away.

"My darling, I am not quite strong enough now after all you have been telling me. Although I had dark suspicions yesterday that some plot was in action; for I had observed that things in the study were not as I had left them; and I had other reasons too. But take me, my precious child, to the sunny bank this afternoon, and please God, I will at least begin my tale."

I begged him in vain to defer it: there was a weight upon his mind, he said, which he must unload. So

in the early afternoon, I wheeled him gently to the sheltered nook. There, with the breezes way-lost among new streets of verdure, tall laburnum dangling chains of gold around us, and Giudice stretching out his paws in sunny yawns of glory, I listened to my uncle's tale, and was too young to understand the sigh which introduced it. How few may tell the story of their lives without remembering how they played with life! Alas the die thrown once for all, but left to roll unwatched, and lie uncounted!

Though I cannot tell the story in his impressive way, I will try to repeat it, so far as my memory serves, in his words, and with his feelings. Solemnly and sadly fell the history from his lips, for his mind from first to last was burdened with the knowledge that the end was nigh at hand, that nothing now remained, except to wait with resignation the impending blow.

STORY OF EDGAR VAUGHAN.

"I HAVE always been, as you know, of a roving unsocial nature. My father being dead before I was born, and my mother having married again before I

could walk, there was little to counteract my centrifugal tendencies. I seemed to belong to neither family; though I always clung to the Vaughans, and disliked the Daldys. The trustees of my mother's settlement were my virtual guardians; for all the Vaughan estates being most strictly entailed, my father had nothing to dispose of, and therefore had made no will. My mother's settlement comprised only personal estate, for no power had been reserved under the entail to create any charges upon the land. The mortgages, of which no doubt you have heard, as paid off by your father, were encumbrances of long standing.

"The estates, I need not tell you, were shamefully mismanaged, during your father's long minority. An agent was appointed under the Court of Chancery, and an indolent rogue he was. Meanwhile your father and myself went through the usual course of education, no difference being made in that respect between us. Although we were only half-brothers, we were strongly attached to each other, especially after a thorough drubbing which your good papa found it his duty to administer to me at Eton. It did me a world of good; before that, I had rather despised him for the gentle-

ness of his nature. At Oxford, after your father had left, I kept aloof both from the great convivial and from the thinly peopled reading set, and lived very much by myself. Soon as the humorous doings, whose humour culminates in the title 'lectures,' soon as these were over, I was away from the freckled stones, punting lazily on the Cherwell, with French and Italian novels; or lounging among the gipseys on the steppes of Cowley. Hall I never frequented, but dined at some distant tavern, and spent the evening, and often the night till Tom-curfew, in riding through the lonely lanes towards Otmoor, Aston Common, or Stanlake. It was strange that I never fell in love, for I had plenty of small adventures, and fell in with several pretty girls, but never one I cared for. Gazing on the wreck I am, it is no conceit to say that in those times I was considered remarkably good-looking. Of course I was not popular; that I never cared for; but nobody had reason to dislike me. I affected no peculiarity, gave myself no airs, behaved politely to all who took the trouble to address me; and the world, which I neither defied nor courted, followed its custom in such cases, and let me have my way.

"At Lincoln's Inn, my life was much the same, except that wherries succeeded punts, and evening rides were exchanged for moonlight walks in the park. It was reported at home, as it is of most men who are called to the Bar, that I was likely to do great things. There never was a chance of it. Setting aside the question of ability, I had no application, no love of the law, no idea whatever of touting; and still more fatal defect, my lonely habits were darkening into a shy dislike of my species.

"You have heard that I was extravagant. As regards my early career, the charge is quite untrue. Money, I confess, was never much in my thoughts, nor did I ever attempt to buy things below their value; but my wants were so few, and my mode of life so ungenial, that I never exceeded the moderate sum allotted to me as a younger son. Afterwards this was otherwise, and for excellent reasons.

"During the height of the London season I was always most restless and misanthropic. Not that I looked with envy on the frivolous dust of fashion, and clouds of sham around me; but that I felt myself lowered as an Englishman by the cringing, the falsehood, the

small babooneries, which we call 'society.' I longed to be, if I could but afford it, where men have more manly self-respect, and women more true womanhood.

"Your parents were married, my darling Clara, at the end of December, 1826, six years before your birth. Upon that occasion, your dear father, the only man in the world for whom I cared a fig, made me a very handsome present. In fact he gave me a thousand pounds. He would have given me a much larger sum, for he was a most liberal man, but the estates had suffered from long mismanagement, and were seriously encumbered. I do not hesitate to say that the gross income of this property is now double what it was when your father succeeded to it, and the net income more than quadruple. During the four years which elapsed between that event and his marriage, he had devoted all he could spare to the clearance of encumbrances and therefore, as I said, the present he made me was a most generous one. More than this, he invited and pressed me to come and live on the estate, and offered to set me up in a farm which I might hold from him on most advantageous terms. Upon my refusal, he even begged me to accept, at a most liberal salary, the

stewardship of the property, and the superintendence of great improvements, which he meant to effect. I remember, as if it were yesterday, the very words he used. He took my hand in his, and with that genial racy smile, which very few could resist,

"'Come, Ned,' he cried, 'there are but two of us; there's room for both in the old nest; and you are big enough to thrash me now.'"

At the sweet recollection of his Eton drubbing, as he called it, my poor uncle's eyes grew moist.

"So you see, my child, instead of grudging your father the property, I had every reason to love and revere him. However, I refused this as well as the other offer; but I accepted his present, and invested it rather luckily. After spending a pleasant month at home—as I always called it—I returned to London early in April, 1827. There are no two minds alike, any more than there are two bodies; and yet how little variety exists in polite society! Surely it were more reasonable to wedge the infant face into a jelly-mould, to flute its ears and cheeks like collared head, and grow the nose and lips and eyebrows into rosettes and grapes and acorns, than to bow and cramp and squeeze a million

minds into one set model. Yet here I find men all alike, Dane and Saxon, Celt and Norman, like those who walk where snow is deep, or Alpine travellers lashed to a rope, trudging each in other's footprint, swinging all their arms in time, looking neither right nor left, and so on through life's pilgrimage, a file some million deep. Who went first they do not know, why they follow they cannot tell, what it leads to they never ask. I was marked and scorned at once, because I dared to adopt a hat that did not scalp me in half-an hour, and a cravat that did not throttle me; and even had the hardihood to dine when I felt hungry. How often I longed for a land of freedom and common sense, where it is no disgrace to carry a barrel of oysters, or shake hands with a tradesman. I know what you are smiling at, Clara. You are thinking to yourself, 'how different you are now, my good uncle; and wern't you a little inconsistent in sanctioning all this livery humbug here?' Yes, I am different now. I am older and wiser than to expect to wipe away with my coat-sleeve the oxide of many centuries. As for the livery, it makes them happy: it is an Englishman's uniform. And I have seen and suffered so bitterly from the vio-

lence of an untamed race, that I admire less what I used to call the unlassoed arch of the human neck. I have seen a coarse line somewhere,

"'And freedom made a deal too free with me,'

which expresses briefly the moral of my life. However, at the time I speak of, nursing perhaps a younger son's bias against the social laws, and fresh from the true simplicity and unaffected warmth of your father's character and the gentle sweetness of your mother's, I could not sit on the spikes of fashion's hackney coach, as becomes a poor Briton, till the driver whips behind. Finding of course that no one cared whether I sat there or not, and that all I got at the side of the road was pea-shots from cads in the dickey, I did what thousands have done before me, and will probably do again, I voted my fellow-Britons a parcel of drivelling slaves, and longed to be out of the gang. Perhaps I should never have made my escape, for like most of my class, I spent all my energy in small eccentricity, if it had not been for what we idlers entitle the force of circumstances. At a time when my life was flowing on calmly enough though babbling against its banks, it came suddenly on

an event which drove it into another and rougher channel.

"Early one afternoon in the month of April, 1829, I launched my little boat from the Temple-stairs, where I kept it, and feeling more than usually saturnine and moody, resolved on a long expedition. So I victualled my ship like Robinson Crusoe, and took some wraps and coverings. It was then slack water, just at the height of the flood. I meant to have gone to Richmond, but being far too indolent to struggle against the tide, I yielded to nature's good pleasure, and pulled away down stream. In a few minutes a rapid ebb tide was running, and I made up my mind to go with it as far as ever it chose, and to return with the flood whenever that pleased to meet me.

"After rowing steadily for several hours, I found myself a long way past my customary Cape Turn-again. With a strong ebb tide as well as a land-fresh in the river, I had got beyond Barking Reach, and as far as the Dagenham marshes. Here some muddy creeks, pills, and sluggish channels wind and welter among the ooze-lands on the north side of the Thames. All around them stretches and fades away a dreary flat

monotonous waste; no dot of a house, no jot of a tree, to vary the dead expanse; except that by the river-side one or two low cabooses, more like hoys than houses, are grounded among the slime. This, so far as my memory serves, was the state of these Essex marshes in the year 1829: how it is now I cannot say.

"It was high time for me to turn: row as I would, I could hardly get back to my haven by midnight. Outrigger skiffs were not yet known; and an oarsman could not glide along at the rate of ten miles an hour. Just as I was working round, a steam packet, which had been moored a short way below, crippled perhaps in her engines, now at the turn of the tide passed up, and was quickly out of sight. As she passed me I hailed for a tow-rope; but either they could not hear, or they did not choose to notice me. There was nothing for it but to bend my back to the oars, and keep a sharp look out. Presently the flood began to make strongly up the river, and I gave way with a will, my paddles bending and the water gleaming in the early starlight. It was a lonely and melancholy scene. The gray mist returning from some marshy excursion, and hugging the warm sea-water, floated along in dull folds, with a white flaw

of steam here and there curdling over the current. Not a ship, not a barge was in sight; no voice of men or low of cattle broke the foggy silence: but the wash of the stream on its sludgy marge, or on some honeycombed mooring-post, surged every now and then betwixt the jerks of my rowlocks. The loneliness and the sadness harmonised with my sombre mind. All is transient, all is selfish, all is a flux of melancholy. If we toss and dance we are only boats adrift; we are nothing more than crazy tide-posts, if we be philosophers.

"Suddenly a clear loud cry broke my vacant musings. It startled me so that I caught a crab, ceased rowing, and gazed around. At first I could not tell whence it came, till my boat, with the way she had on her, shot round a low spit of the Essex shore, which from the curve of the river I was nearing rapidly. Louder and louder the cry was twice repeated, and I heard in the still spring evening the oaths of men and the scuffling of feet. Within fifty yards of me was an ill-looking house, made of battens, and raised on piles above high water mark. A tattered sign hung on a pole, and a causeway led to the steps. While I was hesitating, two

figures crossed a lattice window, as if in violent struggle, and a heavy crash resounded. Three strong strokes of my oars, and the keel grated on the causeway. Out I leaped with the boat-hook, threw the painter over a post, and rushed up the slimy jetty, and the narrow wooden steps. The door was fastened, I pushed it with all my force, but in vain. One faint scream reached my ears, as of some one at length overpowered. Swinging the boat-hook with both hands, I struck the old door with the butt, and broke it open. In the lower room there was no one, but a moaning and trampling sounded over head. Upstairs I ran, and into the room where the villany was doing. A poor girl lay on the floor at the last gasp of exhaustion. Two ruffians with a rope were bending over her. Down went one, at a blow of my boat-hook, flat beside his victim: the other leaped at my throat. I saw and soon felt that he was a powerful man, but in those days I was no cripple. We were most evenly matched. I wrenched his hand from my throat, but twice he got me under him, twice I writhed from his grasp like a python from a tiger's jaw. Clutched and locked in each other's arms, in vain we tugged to get room for a blow. Throttle, and gripe,

and roll—which should be first insensible? An accident gave me the mastery. For a moment we lay face to face, glaring at each other, drawing the strangled breath, loosing the deadly grip, panting, throbbing, and watching. My boat-hook lay on the floor, my enemy spied and made a sudden dash at it. Instead of withholding, I jobbed him towards it with all my might, and as he raised it, the point entered one of his eyes. With a yell of pain and fury, he sank beneath me insensible. Shaking and quaking all over after the desperate struggle, I bound him and his mate, hand and foot, with the twisted tarry junk, which they had meant for the maiden.

"At length I had time to look round. On a low truckle bed at the end of the long dark room, in which a ship-lamp was burning, there lay an elderly lady in a perfect stupor of fright and illness. Upon the floor with her head thrown back against the timbers, and her black eyes wide open and fixed on me, sat a girl of remarkable beauty, though her cheeks were as white as death. A magnificent ring, for which she had fought most desperately, was wrenched from its place on her finger and hung over the opal nail, for her hands

were clenched, and her arms quite stiff, in the swoon of utter exhaustion. Both ladies were in deep mourning.

"For the rest a few words will suffice. The poor ladies revived at last, after chafing of hands and sprinkling, and told me where to find the woman of the house, who had been locked up in another room by her husband and brother. There was no one else on the premises. How came the ladies there, what was their destination, and why were they so outraged? They were on their return to London from the Continent, being called home by tidings of death, and had sailed from Antwerp two days and a-half before, in the steamer which I had seen lying to. Steamers were then heavy lumbering things, and all that time Mrs. Green and her daughter had been knocking about on a pecky sea. No wonder that the poor mother had cried out feebly, to be landed anywhere, anywhere in the world, where things would leave off going round. And before they came to that tedious halt in the river, fair Adelaide, who had enjoyed her meals throughout, renewed and completed her poor mamma's excavation, by inquiring calmly with her mouth full of pickled pork, where the peas-pudding

was. Now too Miss Adelaide soon recovered from her fearful battle for honour and life. She was what is called now-a-days a girl of "splendid organisation." If she had not been so, she would have lain ere now with her mother at the bottom of Barking Reach. The two scoundrels of that lonesome hostelry had been ordered to send to Barking for a conveyance. But they only pretended to do so; for they had cast foul covetous eyes on the wealth of their unknown guests and on brave Adelaide's beauty. Beyond a doubt both ladies would have been murdered, but for the gallant resistance, the vigour, and presence of mind of Adelaide.

"Having restored their watches, and scattered trinkets, and led the poor things from the scene of the combat, I was quite at a loss for means to convey them home. Barking was a long way off, and the marshy track unknown to me, and not likely to be found in the dark. Moreover, there must be some hazard in leaving them still in that villanous den, no matter how their cowardly foes might be bound. At last, and with great difficulty, I embarked the two ladies in my shallop, and wrapped them warmly from the night air; then

after relashing my prisoners, and locking them up in separate rooms, and the woman downstairs, I pulled away stoutly for Woolwich. Here I obtained a carriage, and started my convoy for London, and then returned with two policemen to the "Old Row Barge," as the low caboose was called. But both our birds were flown, as I was inclined to expect. Most likely the woman had contrived to get out, and release them. At any rate the "Old Row Barge" had no crew, and the deserters had set it on fire. The flames, as we rowed away, after vainly searching the marshes, cast a lurid glow on the mud-banks, and on the slackening tide; a true type it was of what soon befell me—the burning of my caboose. The two men were caught long afterwards by the Thames Police, and transported for life on a conviction for river piracy. At least, I was told that they were the men."

"And of course, dear uncle, you fell deeply in love with the beautiful Adelaide Green."

"Of course, my dear, a young lady would conclude so. But at present I must not talk any more." I had several times tried to stop him. "And what I have next to relate is matter of deeper feeling. By Jove, to

think how I battled with that strong man! And now your little fist, Clara, would floor me altogether."

He sighed, and I sighed for him. Then I thought of Mr. Shelfer, and gloried in my prowess, as I wheeled my uncle home.

CHAPTER VIII.

My uncle's tale, as repeated here, will no more be broken either by my interruptions, which were frequent enough, or by his own pauses, but will be presented in a continuous form.

Story of Edgar Vaughan.

"On the following day, when I called at the house in Bloomsbury—then a fashionable neighbourhood—to which I had been directed, I was met at the threshold, with power and warmth, by Peter Green himself, an old acquaintance of mine, who proved to be Adelaide's brother. My nature had been too reserved for me to be friendly with him at College, but I had liked him much better than any one else, because he was so decided and straight-forward. The meeting rather surprised me, for Green is not a rare name, and so it had never occurred to me to ask the weary Adelaide whether she knew one Peter Green, a first-class man of Christ-

church. Peter, who was a most hearty fellow, and full, like his sister, of animal life, overpowered me with the weight of his gratitude, which I did not at all desire or deserve. As, in spite of your rash conclusion, my romantic Clara, I did not fall in love with Adelaide, who besides her pithsome health and vigour was in many respects astray from my fair ideal, and more than all, was engaged long ago to the giver of the sapphire ring, I need not enlarge upon my friendship with Peter Green, whom I now began to like in real earnest.

Young as he was, his father's recent death had placed him at the head of a leading mercantile house, Green, Vowler, and Green, of Little Distaff Lane. And young as he was—not more than seven-and-twenty—his manners were formed, and his character and opinions fixed, as if he had seen all the ways, and taken stock of the sentiments of all the civilised world. Present to him any complexity, any conflict of probabilities, any maze whose ins and outs were abroad half over the universe, and if the question were practical, he would see what to do in a moment; if it were theoretical, he would quietly move it aside. I have known many learned

judges sum up a case most lucidly, blow away all the verbiage, sweep aside all the false issues, balance the contradictions, illuminate all the obscurities, and finally lift from its matrix, and lay in the colourless sunlight the virgin truth, without either dross or polish. All this Peter Green seemed to have done in a moment, without any effort, without any reasoning process; not jumping at his conclusion, but making it fly to him. He possessed what an ancient writer, once highly esteemed at Oxford, entitles the "wit universal," which confers and comprises the "wit of details." For this power when applied to a practical purpose, a great historian employs a happy expression not welcomed by our language; he calls it the power to "pontoon the emergency." Excuse my harsh translation, perhaps it is better than paraphrase.

With all these business qualities, my friend was as merry and unpretentious a man as ever made a bad joke, or laughed at another fellow's; liberal also, warm-hearted, and not sarcastic. In a word, he was a genuine specimen of the noble English merchant, who has done more to raise this country in the esteem of the world than would a thousand Nelsons or Wellingtons.

Now this man discerned at a glance the wretched defects of my nature and position. An active mind like his could never believe in the possibility of being happy without occupation. And by occupation he meant, not the chasing of butterflies, or maundering after foxes, but real honest Anglo-Saxon work; work that strings the muscles, or knits the hemispheres of the brain. And work he would himself, ay, and with all his energies. Not the man was he to tap the table with his pipe, and cry out, "Bravo, Altiora! A little more gin if you please, and chalk it down to the Strike;" but he was the man to throw off his coat, and pitch into the matter before him without many words, though with plenty of thought. Now, this man, feeling deeply indebted to me, and beginning to like me as my apathy and reserve went to pieces before his energy, this man, I say, cast about for some method of making me useful and happy. Wonderfully swift as he was in pouncing upon the right thing, I believe it took him at least five minutes to find out the proper course for an impracticable fellow like me. And when he had found this out, it took even him a week to draw the snail out of his hole. Years of agreeable indolence, and

calm objective indifference, seldom ruffled except at fashionable snobbery, had made of me not a Sybarite, or a supercilious censor, much less a waiter on fortune, but a contemplative islander, a Haytian who had been once to Spain, and would henceforth be satisfied with the view of her caravels. But my Adelantado was a man of gold and iron. Green, Vowler, and Green were largely concerned in the oil and dried fruit business. They had ransacked the olive districts of continental Europe, and found the price going up and the quality going down, so they wanted now to open another oil vein.

Peter Green observing my love of uncultured freedom, the only subject on which I ever grew warm and rapturous, espied the way to relieve me of some nonsense, give my slow life a fillip, and perhaps—oh climax —open a lucrative connexion. He knew, for he seemed to know everything done or undone by commerce, that there was a glorious island rich in jewels and marble and every dower of nature, and above all teeming with olives, lemons, and grapes, and citrons; and that this gifted island still remained a stranger, through French and Genoese ignorance, to our London trade. This was

the island libelled by Seneca, idolised by its natives, drenched with more blood than all the plains of Emathia, yet mother of heroes and conquerors of the world—if that be any credit—in a single word, Corsica. Once or twice indeed our countrymen have attempted to shake hands with this noble race, so ruined by narrow tradition ; and in the end we shall doubtless succeed, as we always do ; but the grain of the Corsican is almost as stubborn as our own. In fact the staple is much the same, the fabric is very different. Bold they are, and manly, simple, generous, and most hospitable, lovers too of their country beyond all other nations ; but—oh fatal ignorance—industry to them is drudgery ; and labour is an outrage. Worse than all is the fiend of the island, the cursed Blood-revenge.

" Just the place for you, Vaughan," said the indomitable Peter, " every one there as dignified as an eagle after stealing a lamb. No institutions to speak of, but the natural one of Vendetta, splendid equality, majestic manhood, lots of true womanhood, and it does all the work that *is* done, which isn't saying much. Why, my dear Quixotic, the land of Sampiero and Paoli, and where Rousseau was to legislate, only he proved too

lazy,—is not that the jockey for you? After all these levees and masquerades that you so much delight in—you need not scowl like a bandit; it is only because they don't want you, you are just the same as the rest, or why do you notice the nonsense?—after all this London frippery, Monte Rotondo will be a fresh oyster after devil'd biscuits."

"True enough, my friend: but an oyster to be swallowed shell and all."

"Well, is not that just what you want? Lime is good for squeamishness. And more than that, you are just the man we want. You can talk Italian with excellent opera style and sentiment; and you won't be long till you fraternise with the Corsicans. Perhaps they will drive out the French, who don't know what to do with it, and make you their king like Theodore of Neuhoff; and then you proclaim free trade restricted to the navy of Green, Vowler, and Green. But in sober earnest, think of it, my dear Vaughan. Anything is better than this cynic indolence. Some of your views will be corrected, and all enlarged by travel. A common sentiment. Yes, the very thing you are short of. All your expenses we pay of course, and give you an honest

salary; and all we ask of you is to explore more than a tourist would, and to send us a plain description of everything. You have plenty of observation; make it useful instead of a torment to you. We know well enough the great gifts of that island, but we want to know how they lie, and how we may best get at them."

"Then you would expect me to make commercial arrangements?"

Peter laughed outright. "I should rather fancy not. Somewhat queer ones they would be. Platonic no doubt, and panisic, but not altogether adapted to double entry."

"Then in fact I am to go as a committee of inquiry."

"I have told you all we want. If you make any friends all the better; but that we leave to yourself. Perhaps you'll grow sociable there. Though the Corsican does not sing, 'We won't go home till morning,' and be going home all the time."

"And how long would my engagement last?"

"Till you have thoroughly traversed the country, if you stick to it so long; and then if you quit yourself well, we should commission you for Sardinia. What an opening for an idle man, though it would soon kill

me—so little to do. But you may cut it short when you like. Plenty of our people would jump at such an offer; but for a country like that we must have a thorough gentleman. A coarse-mannered bagman would very soon secure the contents of a fusil. He would be kissing the Corsican girls, who are wonderfully lovely they say, and their lovers amazingly jealous; and every man carries a gun. A timid man they despise, an insolent man they shoot; and most of our fellows are one or the other, or both. But will you undertake it? Yes, or no, on the spot. And I ask you to say 'yes' as a special favour to me."

"Then of course I say yes. When shall I go?"

"To-morrow, if you like. Next month if you prefer it. We can give you introductions. There is no real danger for a thorough gentleman, or you should not go for all the olives in Europe. Mind we want a particular sort, very long and taper—Virgil's 'Ray,' in fact. You shall have a sample of it. As yet we know but one district of Italy where it grows, but have got scent of it in Corsica. Glorious fellows they are, if half that I hear is true, glorious fellows but for their laziness, and that —— Vendetta."

To be brief, I received very clear instructions in writing, and was off for Bonifazio the following week, in a small swift yacht of my own, a luxury to which I had always aspired, and which I could now for a time afford. But before I went, your poor father, Clara, protested most strongly against the scheme, and even came to London in the vain hope of dissuading me. He had some deep presentiment that it would end darkly, and so indeed it did.

"Ned," said he once more, "there are only two of us, and my dear wife is very delicate. I have been at Genoa, where those islanders are well known, and even there they are rarely spoken of but with a cold shudder. They are a splendid race, I believe, great heroes and all that, but they shoot a man with no more compunction than they shoot a muffro. I implore you, my dear brother, not to risk the last of our family, where blood flows as freely as water. And your temper, you know, is not the best in the world. Don't go, my dear fellow, don't go. I shall have to come and avenge you, and I don't understand Vendetta."

Ah, me! If I had only listened to him. And yet, I don't know. After a pleasant voyage we reached

the magnificent island, about the middle of May. My intention was to skirt round it from the southern extremity, taking the western side first, and touching at every anchorage, whence I would make incursions, and return to my little cutter, as the most convenient head-quarters. Of course I should have to rough it; but what young man would think twice of that, with an adventurous life before him?

I will not weary you, my dear child, with a long description of Corsica. It is a land which combines all the softness and the majesty, all the wealth and barrenness, all the smile and menace of all the world beside. I could talk of it by the hour; but you want to know what I did, and was done to, more than what I saw. From the awful rock of Bonifazio, the streets where men should have no elbows, and the tower of Torrione, along the fantastic coast which looks as if time were a giant rabbit, we traced the blue and spur-vexed sea, now edged with white, and now with gray, and now with glowing red, until we reached that paradise of heaven, the garden of Balagna.

CHAPTER IX.

STORY OF EDGAR VAUGHAN.

LET me hold myself. Weak as I am and crippled by premature old age, not the shortness of my breath, not the numbness of my heart, not even the palsy of my frame, can quench or check the fire rekindled by the mere name of that heavenly valley. To live there only half a minute is worth a day of English life. Life—it is a space to measure, not by pendulum or clock-hand, not by our own strides to and fro (the ordnance scale of the million), not even by the rolling sun, and nature's hail and farewell; but by the well-spring of ourselves, the fount of thought and feeling. Every single breath I draw of this living air—air the bride of earth our sire, wedded to him by God Creator, air whose mother-milk we fight for in clusters baulking one another—every breath I draw dances with a buoyant virtue, sucked, in any other land, but from mountain nipples. Bright air of a rosy blue, where

northern eyes are dazed with beauty, where every flower cuts stars of light, and every cloud is sunshine's step; can even lovers parted thus believe themselves divided? Every rock has its myrtle favour, every tree its clematis wreath; under the cistus and oleander hides the pink to lace its bodice, watched by the pansy's sprightly eye. Lavishly, as children's bubbles, hover overhead oranges, and citrons, lemons, almonds, figs, varied by the blushing peach and the purpling grape. Far behind, and leaning forth the swarthy bosom of the mountain, whose white head leans on the heaven, are ranks on ranks of glaucous olive, giants of a green old age dashed with silver gray. And oh, the fragrance under foot, the tribute of the ground, which Corsica's great son—as we men measure greatness—pined for in the barren isle, where the iron of his selfishness entered his own soul.

These are said to be the largest olive-trees in the world, and of the very best varieties. Heaps upon heaps the rich fruit lies at the foot of the glorious tree; nature is too bountiful for man to heed her gifts. For this district of Balagna, and that of Nebbio further north, my attention had been especially bespoken by my shrewd and sagacious friend. Therefore and by reason of the

charms around me, here I resolved to pass the summer; so my vessel was laid up at Calvi, and being quartered in Belgodere at a little Inn—"locanda" it should be called, but I hate interlarding—I addressed myself right heartily to business and to pleasure.

First I had to study the grand Palladian gift. Unless old Seneca was, as the Corsicans say, a great liar, he cannot have been the author of that epigram which declares this land a stranger to the peaceful boon. It is impossible to believe that a country so adapted to that tree, so often colonized by cultured races, can have been so long ungifted with its staff of life. The island itself in that same epigram is utterly mis-described.

As regards the inhabitants, the first line of the well-known couplet is verified by ages; to the second it does not plead guilty now, and probably never did

> "Law the first revenge. Law the second to live by robbery.
> Law the third to lie. The fourth to deny any Gods."

The Corsicans, on the contrary, have always been famous for candour, whose very soul is truth, and for superstition, the wen or hump of religion. For my own part, loving not that unprincipled * fellow hard labour,

* "Labor improbus" of Virgil.

towards whom these noble islanders entertain a like antipathy, and loving much any freedom not hostile to my own, I got on with the natives admirably, for a certain time. Time had reconciled me to their custom of carrying, instead of cane or umbrella, long double-barrelled guns, whose muzzle they afford the stranger full opportunity of inspecting. First-rate marksmen are they, but they sling their guns at hap-hazard on their backs, and cheek to jowl we come upon the cold metal at the corner of the narrow streets. Tall and powerful men they are, especially the mountaineers; with all the Spaniard's dignity and the Italian's native grace. The women are lithe, erect, and beautifully formed, with a swan-like carriage, and a free and courteous bearing, such as very few of our high-born damsels own.

The olive-growers frankly gave me all their little information about that tree whose typical virtues they have never cared to learn. The variety chiefly grown, or rather which chiefly grows itself, is one they call the Genoese. The owners afford them very little culture, and many are too idle even to collect the fruit. There are said to be ten million olive-trees in the island; at least they were reckoned up to that number by order of

the Government; then the enumerators grew tired, and left off counting. Whatever number there is might easily be tripled, if any one had the energy to graft the oleasters, with which the hills are covered. There is also the Saracen olive, and the Sabine, the latter perhaps the Regia of Columella, Raggiaria of Cæsalpinus, and Radius of Virgil. However, though not unlike my sample fruit, it was not quite identical, and as my employers wanted a very special sort for very special qualities, I was as far from my object as ever.

One magnificent summer evening, as I rode along the mountain side near the village of Speloncato, suddenly the track turned sharply into a wooded dingle. Steeped in the dream of nature's beauty, I was thinking of nothing at all, as becomes a true Corsican, when I received a sharpish knock in the eye. Something fell and lodged in my capacious beard. Smarting from the pain, I caught it, and not being able to see clearly, took it at first for a spent and dropping bullet. But when my eyes had ceased to water, I found in my hand a half-grown olive of the very kind I had so long been seeking. I drew forth some of my London specimens, which had been chemically treated to prevent their shrivelling, and

compared it narrowly. Yes, there could be no doubt; the same pyriform curve, the same bulge near the peduncle, the same violet lines in the skin, and when cut open, the same granulation and nucleus. I was truly delighted, at length I should be of some real service; at least if there were many trees here of this most rare variety. By riding up the dingle, I soon ascertained that it was planted with trees of this sort only, gray old trees of a different habit from any other olive. Afterwards I found that it requires a different soil, and a different aspect. Full speed I galloped back to the hamlet of Speloncato, and inquired for the owner of this olive Eldorado. Signor Dezio Della Croce, owner of all this lovely slope, and of large estates extending as far as the road to Corte; in fact the chief proprietor of the neighbourhood. He was, said the peasant with some pride, a true descendant of the great race of Cinarca, foremost in the island annals for a thousand years, and of whom was the famous Giudice Della Rocca, Count and Judge of Corsica, six hundred years ago."

At the sound of his name, Giudice opened his great sleepy eyes, and pricked his ears: I promised not to interrupt, but he gave no such pledge.

"Let the Cinarchesi blood go for its full value; but it was worth something to the Della Croce to be descended also from the Tuscan Malaspina; for the lands of those great Marquises were now in the possession of the Signor Dezio. And the Signor had such a daughter, a young maiden. Ah, Madonna! The loveliest girl in Corsica. And the vine-dresser crossed himself. As I listened to all this information, I began to look through my unused credentials, which I always carried. It struck me that this name of Della Croce was quite familiar to me, though I knew not how, until a letter in the sprawling hand of young Laurence Daldy fell out from among Peter's crabbed characters. Laurence Daldy, my mother's younger son, was now in full career, as a pigeon and a Guardsman, spending at full gallop his dead father's money. These Daldys were of Italian origin, the true name being D'Aldis, which after some years of English life they had naturalised into Daldy. And now I recollected that when we Vaughan boys scorned them as ignoble sons of commerce, they used to brag about their kinship to the ancient Della Croce.

Riding up the forest hill, on whose western bluff stands boldly the gray old tower of the Malaspinas, I

began of course to make forecasts about the character of my host. My host I knew he needs must be, for Corsica is of all the world the most hospitable spot. Although by this time well acquainted with the simple island habits, I could not but expect to find a man of stateliness and surroundings, of stiffness and some arrogance. Now the sun was setting, and the western fire from off the sea glanced in spears of reddening gold into the solemn timeworn keep. All things looked majestic, but a deal too lonely. Where was I to apply, how was I to get in? The narrow doorway overhung with the wreck of some portcullis, was blocked instead with a sort of mantlet like the Roman Vinea; the loopholes on the ground-tier were boarded almost to the top, the high windows, such as they were, had their rough shutters closed. Everything betokened a state of siege and fear. Two or three magnificent chesnuts, which must have commanded the front of the tower, had been cut down and added to the defences of the approach. Over these I managed at last to leap my horse, who was by no means a perfect hunter; and there I halted at a loss how to proceed. I had been long enough in Corsica to know, even without a certain ominous gleam from a loophole, and the view in

transverse section of a large double-barrelled gun, that the owner of this old mansion was now in the pleasant state of Vendetta.

Expecting every moment to be shot, and nothing said about it, I waved my letter, as a white flag, furiously above my head. Presently that frightful muzzle was withdrawn, and the slide pushed back, to reconnoitre me at leisure. I tried, for the first time in my life, to look like a real Briton; my Corsican ambition was already on the wane. So I sat my horse, and waited; and what came was worth a thousand years of waiting.

Round the bastion of the tower, under the rich magnolia bloom, towards me glided through the rosy shadow the loveliest being that ever moved outside the gates of heaven. She seemed not to walk but waft along, like the pearly Nautilus. A pink mandile of lightest gauze lit the sable of her clustering hair, and wreathing round her graceful head deepened the tinge of the nestling cheeks. The lithe faldetta of white cashmere, thrown hastily over the shoulders, half concealed the flowing curves of the slender supple form, half betrayed them as it followed every facile motion. But when she smiled —oh, Clara, I would have leaped from her father's tower,

or into the black caves of the Restonica, for one smile of hers. The dark-fringed lustre of her eyes seemed to dance with golden joy, trusting, hoping, loving all things, pleasure pleased at pleasing. And the gleesome arch of her laughing lips, that never shaped evil word! Oh, my Lily, my own Lily, I shall see you soon again.

My dear Clara, I ought to know better. I am ashamed of myself. And after so many years! But at the first glance of Fiordalisa, my fate was fixed for this life and the other. I never had loved before. I never had cared to look at a girl; in fact I despised them all. Now I paid for that contemptuous folly. Loving at one glance, loving once, for all, for ever, my heart stood still like the focus of a hurricane; my speech and every power but that of vision failed me. I dared not try to leave the saddle, such a trembling took me.

It was a visitation unknown in our foggy plains, scoffed at by our prosy race, but known full well in Southern climes, as the sunstroke of love. My own darling—I can call her nothing less—my own delicious darling was quite startled at me. Whether she had a like visitation in a milder form, is more than I can say; but I hope with all my heart she had; for

then, as the Southern tale recites, God placed her hand in mine.

How I got my horse tied up, how I followed her through the side entrance, and returned her father's greeting, I have not the least idea; all I know is that she smiled, and I wanted nothing more. But I could not bear to see her in the true Homeric fashion still maintained in Corsica, waiting on us like a common servant, with her beautiful arched feet glancing under the brown pelone, and her tapering white arms laid demurely on her bosom; then at her father's signal how she flew for the purple grapes or the fragrant broccio! But do what she would, it seemed to become her more than all she had done before. As that form of love and elegance flitted through the simple room, and those lustrous heavenly eyes beamed with hospitable warmth, Signor Dezio Della Croce, careworn man with beard of snow, seemed at times no little proud of his sweet and only child, but was too proud to show his pride. As for me, he must have thought that I spoke very poor Italian.

END OF VOL. II.

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